

# BEM at 25

Critical insights  
into a continuing legacy

*Edited by Thomas F. Best and Tamara Grdzeliidze*

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## Preface

It has been suggested that the remarkable “success” of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) stems from three factors.<sup>1</sup> First is the way in which it changed the terms of the ecumenical discourse: the criterion was no longer the degree to which an ecumenical text represented the position of one’s own church or confession, rather how faithfully it reflected “the faith of the Church through the ages”.<sup>2</sup> Second is the fact that BEM dared to ask the churches to draw *specific consequences* from the convergence reflected in the text for their relations with other churches.<sup>3</sup> Third is the breadth of BEM’s appeal; its drafters found a unique combination of theological depth and simplicity of expression, commending the text not only to specialists but to persons in all contexts within the churches. This appeal was strengthened by the fact that BEM deals with issues which are alive, are existential, in the churches today: the reality of a common baptism; the fact of our inability to gather, as one body, at the one table of our one Lord; the difficulties we face in recognizing one another’s ministries.

The churches reacted to BEM with an unprecedented series of official responses to the text.<sup>4</sup> Each came, as requested, from “the highest appropriate level” within the church. Each probed the ecumenical consensus reached in BEM as a way for the churches to move forward in their search for the visible unity of the church. In addition to these responses, BEM also generated numerous reactions and comments from councils of churches, theological faculties, study groups, and individuals.

Faith and Order's "response to the responses"<sup>5</sup> to BEM acknowledged three areas which had been identified by the churches as needing further work: the relation of Scripture and Tradition; issues of sacrament and sacramentality; and the understanding of the church itself. All these have been taken up in subsequent Faith and Order work, not least in the two ecclesiology texts – the Faith and Order study document *The Nature and Mission of the Church*<sup>6</sup> and the WCC Assembly Porto Alegre ecclesiology text "Called to be the One Church"<sup>7</sup> – now before the churches for reflection and response. In these texts, and in other work in Faith and Order and elsewhere in the ecumenical movement, BEM is "alive and well" and continues to exercise its influence today. This is seen not least in the realm of bilateral church discussions, where BEM has proved invaluable as the basis of many inter-church agreements on a wide range of issues.

As its subtitle suggests, this book offers critical insights into the continuing legacy of BEM. While respecting fully the achievement of BEM and its seminal role in the modern ecumenical movement, this collection of essays does not hesitate to ask critical questions: how far does BEM respond to the needs of churches in all the regions of the world, including the South? How far does BEM reflect a particular – and some might say, too timid – form of ecumenism?

This collection explores first the areas of ecclesiology and worship, noting the effect which BEM has had on the liturgical and ecclesiological life of the churches. It deals then with the "reception" of BEM within the churches as seen from a variety of confessional and regional perspectives, including the experience of local parish life. The final section looks "beyond BEM", asking what new perspectives may be necessary for the churches' search for visible unity today in the light of a new ecumenical landscape which, among the other factors, has been formed also by the legacy of BEM.<sup>9</sup>

Through *BEM at 25* we are pleased to recognize the 25th anniversary of the publication of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. May BEM continue to live within the churches and to enliven the ecumenical movement!

The last point, crucial to this collection of essays, is that most of the contributors – who write of course as individual theologians from various traditions – were invited to reflect on the legacy of BEM for a volume dedicated to the 80th birthday of Lukas Vischer, Director of Faith and Order during most of the long process of envisioning and producing the text. In this sense this volume may be regarded as a *Festschrift* for Lukas Vischer, offered in tribute to his commitment to the cause of the visible unity of the church.

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## NOTES

1. See "Introduction" by Metropolitan Vasilios and Thomas F. Best, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 25th anniversary [39th] printing of BEM, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982-2007, p. viii.
2. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, "Preface", p. xiv.
3. *Ibid.*, "Preface", p. xiv.
4. *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vols. I-VI, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Papers Nos. 129, 132, 135, 137, 143, 144 respectively, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1986-1988.
5. *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, Faith and Order Paper No. 149, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1990.
6. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2005.
7. Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2006.
8. See most recently *Growth in Agreement III: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements to 2005*, ed. by Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Thomas F. Best, and Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA, Geneva, World Council of Churches and Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 2007.
9. The editors express sincere gratitude to Mr Alexander Freeman for his devoted work on this publication.

**I. Issues of Ecclesiology  
and Worship**

## Baptism and Christian Initiation in Ecclesiological Perspective

Rev. Prof. S. Mark Heim

At the time *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* was sent to the churches some twenty-five years ago, I had just entered into the work of Faith and Order in the National Council of Churches in the USA and in the World Council of Churches. I was surrounded by many of those who had walked the long historical path towards BEM and who had been present at the Lima meeting. Although the response to BEM was yet uncertain, it was clear that for those persons something extraordinary had already taken place. They bore in their own experience and in their own theologies the effects of that event.

In taking up these three topics, Faith and Order had addressed the issue of Christian disunity at the points where it was most evident to the ordinary person. Whether or not these were the deepest wounds to oneness, they were the most visible. Although the churches individually all professed that there was one baptism and one ministry, they did not necessarily recognize each others' baptism or the validity of each other's ministerial orders. Although we maintained that there was only one eucharist, many denied that the reality was present in others' celebration of the Lord's Supper and/or refused participation in their own celebration to those from other churches. These three nodal points stood at the centre of a

wider web of ritual relations in the body of Christ, extending to other events such as weddings or funerals where people from different Christian communions came together. These were the places where the members of our churches concretely encountered division and barriers.

After many decades of comparing the theologies of the churches, BEM marked a dramatic turn. Rather than formulating and reformulating statements on the nature of the unity we seek, BEM sought to exhibit it. The core text of BEM was not a comparison of views in parallel columns, it was a positive attempt to state the faith of the church through the ages, in a way that could be recognized and claimed by all.

Over these past twenty-five years, the participating churches' response to BEM has ranged from initial hesitant interest to euphoric surprise at the breadth of its impact to a more recent melancholy disappointment at the limits of its long term legacy. We have grown used to what it changed and acutely aware of all it did not achieve or left unaddressed. The occasion of this volume allows me to look back and to affirm the ways in which BEM truly became a theological support for the churches' efforts towards unity, and a point of reference in theological work. In my own communion, and a American Baptist Churches in the USA, the simple act of formulating a response to BEM required a whole new examination of our participation in the search for the unity of the church. The response finally adopted by our representative body was its first explicitly confessional statement offered to the ecumenical conversation, and it occasioned a level of internal theological discussion not known of before. Some have remarked on the irony that an invitation to comment on ecumenical agreements sometimes leads churches to an internal discussion in which their confessional identities are re-emphasized as the standard for evaluation. But this process has a profoundly positive side as well, in which response to ecumenical neighbours becomes the occasion for a renewed appreciation for the apostolic faith itself. In my own communion, the process of responding to BEM remains a standard

by which to measure the intensity of our participation in other aspects of ecumenical life.

As a teacher of systematic theology to a very diverse group of (primarily) Protestant seminarians, I have seen BEM become a literal and figurative reference point for my own work. Since the 1980s in my theology classes we have used BEM as a primary text not for the study of "ecumenism", but for the substantive study of the nature of the church. In their required classes on systematic theology, one of the recurring questions posed to our students is that of identifying common elements in the ecumenical Christian tradition on the primary *loci* of authority and revelation, humanity, Christology, God, salvation, ecclesiology and eschatology. The students are challenged to employ a form of the convergence methodology that was developed in the BEM process. On other topics we approach this task through the exploration of texts and sources drawn from varied Christian traditions. In BEM, on these three topics, we encounter a statement of the faith of the churches produced together by the churches.<sup>1</sup> And in using the text in this way, it becomes part of the theological formation process for teachers and leaders from varied traditions. It is part of the way in which Methodists or Baptists are formed as Methodists or Baptists, a formation that comes not from a particular confession but from the wider church. Such leaders themselves go on to employ BEM or portions of it in parishes as part of the process of catechesis or confirmation within their own specific communions. BEM has become part of the very structure of the church's essential life of teaching and forming disciples. In all these ways, BEM is not only a support for efforts towards unity, it has become an integral part of lived unity.

In North America, we can also observe dramatic acts of unity which would have been impossible without the foundation of BEM. Among the most striking may be the 1997 agreement to establish full communion between the ELCA and three Reformed churches, and the 1999 agreement to establish full communion between the Episcopal Church in the USA and the ELCA.<sup>2</sup> Both decisions were

the fruit of long dialogue, but the heart of that dialogue proceeded on a pattern set in the Lima text, and it was nourished by the process of response to that text that had taken place in each of the participating churches. Full communion, for these churches, is something quite new on the ecumenical scene. It is not merely a step towards closer relationship. It can be seen as a provisional realization of what the shape of unity in reconciled diversity might actually look like. The impetus of these agreements, along with similar developments in other parts of the world, has focused keen attention on the whole topic of full communion. With the urging of its member churches, the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA has been engaged in a long term study of this topic, examining how full communion is understood in these agreements, in international ecumenical discussion, and within other communions that take part in the commission's work.<sup>3</sup>

Having emphasized the positive, it is necessary to recognize that there are also shadows that fall across the BEM legacy. Though the convergence methodology that led to the Lima text has been crucial for the breakthroughs noted above, there is widespread agreement that the way forward cannot be a simple extension of that process. The BEM process looked towards future analogous projects in which the churches would seek a common confession of the apostolic faith and then agreement on common ways of teaching and deciding together. Major subsequent progress has been made on both fronts. The progress on common confession is expressed in the document *Confessing the One Faith*.<sup>4</sup> Progress on a common understanding of the church is notable in two significant developments. One is the ongoing Faith and Order study on "Ecclesiology", expressed in the text *The Nature and Mission of the Church*.<sup>5</sup> The other is the papal encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*. In both cases, the most difficult issues of Christian unity, ones that had been purposely avoided as intractable in the early stages of ecumenical discussion, are taken up directly. This is a phase of ecclesial dialogue that was hardly imaginable at the time of Lima.

But at the same time the consensus around these sequential steps towards unity has itself dissipated. For many there are other issues – ethical, missional, interreligious and social – that need urgent ecumenical attention.<sup>6</sup> Progress on the older unity agenda is paired with calls for that agenda itself to be reformed to take account of these challenges. This is certainly true in the United States, where there are additional concerns as well. One has to do with an erosion in the basis for the struggle towards unity among churches active in the BEM process. This is partly a matter of a shift of energy within churches that have long been prominent in ecumenical work, a shift of energy towards the wider agenda of issues just noted, and towards attention on internal controversy within individual communions, particularly over issues of sexuality and biblical interpretation.

And it is partly a matter of shifting practice and theology relating to areas where agreement and even reception were believed to already exist. To take an example, within some churches expectations and behaviour bearing on baptism (such as the trinitarian language of its formula), confirmation and participation in the eucharist (such as the expectation that baptism and confirmation precede reception of the eucharist) have shifted. Many of these same churches are party to ecumenical agreements premised on views standard in their historical traditions – but no longer necessarily characteristic of their own contemporary practice. Thus, for instance, where Christian initiation and baptism are themselves no longer treated as preconditions for participation in the eucharist, existing agreements about baptism or eucharist or ministry are decisively eroded. This, in other words, is a movement quite different from "reconfessionalism", and might be better characterized as a drift towards "nonconfessionalism".<sup>7</sup>

Another concern has to do with the fact that since the release of the Lima text, the churches and communities in North America who were not participants in its development or reception have increased as a proportional share of the Christian population. If the positive news is that the BEM convergence has borne fruit in

dramatic steps towards unity by many of the churches affected by it, the negative news is that the number of those outside the BEM circle has grown rather than decreased. This is not to say that BEM is without effect even where there was no official response. It has had a certain influence through more informal means. In fact, while remains an ideal entry point for many communities who raise the same issues now on their own timetable.

# I

With this review of context, I would like to turn to a more specific question, that of baptism. Over the last ten years Faith and Order has turned again to this topic, with a special concern as to whether the BEM convergence in thinking about baptism might be able to lead the churches to concrete steps towards common recognition of each other's baptisms. The return to this topic was preceded and prepared by a new focus on the meaning of baptism in the context of worship. This was begun with a WCC Faith and Order consultation in 1994 that explored the structure of Christian worship itself as a point of common reference for unity.<sup>8</sup> After the 1996 Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting in Tanzania, a recognition of baptism specifically addressed the implication of common additional meetings that developed a study document on baptism, "One Baptism: Towards Common Recognition", which was reviewed at the 2004 plenary meeting in Malaysia, has been further revised, and is in process of publication.

In this same period, the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches undertook its own study, entitled "Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism".<sup>10</sup> This study was prompted by the desire to explicate further the role of baptism as a point of reference for Christian unity. It was prompted as well by sensitivity

to what the document called a "new ecumenical challenge". This challenge arises

among the fastest growing and largest Christian communities today, Pentecostals and Evangelicals, many of whom have not been directly involved in the modern ecumenical movement. A particular challenge that they bring is that many of these Christians do not see baptism itself as the point of entry into the body of Christ, but rather as an intimately related consequence of that entry.<sup>11</sup>

This growing portion of the Christian family is made up largely of those who solely practise the baptism of believers and/or who do not see Christian unity based in a common water baptism but in a common faith in and experience of Christ as Lord, a faith and experience mediated by the Holy Spirit. Most of these churches are not denominationally Baptist, and by no means all of them observe baptism only of confessing candidates. The crucial point is more that they regard the decisive act of entry into the koinonia of the church to be a relation of personal faith with Christ. As a footnote illustrative of this wider point, we could observe that in North America (and I believe in most of the rest of the world) even among churches involved in the BEM process, the more recent agreements on full communion have so far not included any agreements that bridged the gap between those that practise infant baptism and those that baptize only believers. In short, convergence on the meaning of baptism appears to be threatened from within the ecumenical circle by an erosion of some of its assumed standards (as described above), and challenged from without by the burgeoning growth of churches that frame the relation of baptism to the church and to Christian unity differently.

Recent ecumenical studies of baptism, in looking beyond the convergent outline of the meaning of baptism found in BEM, have focused explicitly on the question of mutual recognition. In pressing this issue, the conversation has quickly expanded into the

nature of Christian initiation. This path was already signalled at two crucial points in the Lima text on baptism. The first was as follows:

15. Churches are increasingly recognizing one another's baptism as the one baptism into Christ *when* Jesus Christ has been confessed as Lord by the candidate *or*, in the case of infant baptism, when confession has been made by the church (parents, guardians, godparents and congregation) *and* affirmed later by personal faith and commitment...<sup>12</sup> (emphasis mine)

The second was this sentence:

Some churches consider that Christian initiation is not complete without the sealing of the baptized with the gift of the Holy Spirit and participation in holy communion.<sup>13</sup>

In these passages it is indicated that recognition of baptism may necessarily involve more factors than examination of the water rite itself. In the second quotation, the point is that in many churches there is an explicit distinction between the rite of baptism and full Christian initiation, and that within the same communion that performs and recognizes the first, there is a distinctly different recognition that awaits completion of the second. In the first quotation, the occasion for this distinction is the difference between those Christians who insist that the confession of faith in Christ by the person baptized is an integral part of the event of baptism itself (and must precede or be coincident with that event), and those Christians who maintain that this confession of personal faith is part of the implied wholeness of the event (an expectation that belongs carefully, could find no way to reconcile these two perspectives while treating baptism in the narrow scope. But its hopeful move was to shift away from the search for consensus on these disputed points towards another question – that of the mutual recognition of baptism – which could possibly be solved by appeal to the common

theological meanings of baptism that had been developed. Recognition would depend upon seeing the agreed meanings of baptism present within different traditions by widening the scope of the complex of factors that was being compared, and whose equivalence was to be accepted in ecumenical life.

## II

These cues have now been picked up. Both the Faith and Order study paper on baptism and the Joint Working Group's statement approach the problem of mutual recognition by emphasizing a wider context for the understanding of baptism, the context of Christian initiation.<sup>14</sup> In part this reflects attention to baptism as an act of worship, an act of worship that is always set within a complex of ecclesial acts which together constitute initiation. Thus, although water baptism is a discrete act that can be located and identified in our various traditions, virtually all churches demonstrate in their practices that this act, though complete in itself, does not suffice for initiation, if by initiation we mean full entrance into the church. Thus, for instance, for some communions the act of baptism would be viewed as incomplete, in terms of Christian worship and initiation, without elements intrinsically linked to it. Such an element might be the act of chrismation, or the reception of communion on the part of the newly-baptized, whether an infant in an Orthodox liturgy or an adult in some Baptist churches. Some churches that regard the water rite of baptism as an objective entry into the body of the church still have historically not admitted the baptized to the eucharist (a celebration integral to the very nature of the church) until their confirmation at a later time. For some purposes, at least, such churches themselves appear to distinguish full initiation from baptism (in its minimal terms as the water rite alone).

Viewing baptism in this perspective, we may be able to overcome some of the historical impasses in this discussion.



Specifically in terms of mutual recognition, it shifts the question from reciprocal recognition of the rite in the narrowest sense, to reciprocal *recognition* that the event of initiation has been completed, though its elements may have been assembled somewhat differently in one communion than another. Recent ecumenical discussion has focused on a common pattern or *ordo* for baptism, a pattern that includes formation in faith, water washing and participation in the life of the community.<sup>15</sup>

Initiation, in fact, is the question at issue for churches that practise only the baptism of confessing believers. As one Baptist has written, "The name 'Baptist' is unfortunate because it may cover up that for Baptists the decisive issue is not baptism as such but 'the living Church of confessing Christians.'"<sup>16</sup> Those of us who belong to such churches find our "direction of thought is *from* the nature of the church *to* the meaning of baptism: it is because we understand the core of the church community to be committed disciples of Christ ... that we understand baptism to be the seal of the Spirit for a believing and obedient disciple."<sup>17</sup> Those in this tradition do find that the clear scriptural pattern is the baptism of believers, but it is actually more important that they understand the church to be made up of regenerate or confessing participants.

Churches of this type are noted for the openness of their ecclesial structures. They often reject normative creedal statements and binding connectional authorities, while entrusting the most fundamental decisions about the church's teaching, liturgy and practice to the democratic decision of the parishioners. They are well aware that the continuity of apostolic faith cannot be maintained, in the absence of more authoritative church structures, unless the members of the community are characterized by high levels of faith and commitment. The process of initiation then comes to be absolutely central to the viability of this vision of the church. For Christian initiation is at the same time initiation into an office — that of church member — which holds the magisterial power for oversight and definition of the church's life. To put it another way, those in such churches object more strongly to an

ecclesiology based on infant baptism than they do to infant baptism itself.

When Baptist-type churches are asked to practise mutual recognition of baptism, the most difficult element is an expectation that those who have undergone the water rite in another communion should be accepted as members in believers' churches without the determination that they have completed Christian initiation. This is to ask Baptist-type churches to accept as participants in the governance of their communions, as custodians of the apostolic faith, those who would not be entrusted with those tasks in the churches from which they come, or who may not be in any way currently connected with or involved in that church — or indeed any other.<sup>18</sup> From this perspective, the expectation of mutual recognition of baptism looks like a demand to equate the experience of the water rite, taken in very narrow terms, with full Christian initiation. Those churches of the Baptist type that do extend recognition of baptism (that is, who do not require those who were baptized as infants to be baptized as confessing adults in order to become members), do so on the grounds that the person entering membership gives evidence, by their own profession of faith, that the event of washing in the name of the Trinity has been fulfilled as an act of Christian initiation.

Within those traditions that practise infant baptism, it is typically the case that there are structures for teaching, governance and leadership and that those who enter into authority in those structures must meet many further standards in addition to having a recognized baptism. For instance, lay leaders would be required to have been confirmed subsequent to their baptism, and ordained ministers, whether presbyteral or episcopal, to whom certain decisions are reserved, would be required to have major additional instruction and testing. Given such structures, these traditions can afford to be both somewhat vague about the point at which Christian initiation is actually complete and quite precise in isolating the event of baptism as an act to be recognized in its own right.

For those in the gathered church tradition, the event of baptism is coincident with full Christian initiation, in the sense that the baptized immediately assumes a full place in the life of the church and also a full and equal voice in the governance and teaching of the local church. If a candidate who was baptized in another Christian denomination is turned aside from automatic membership in a Baptist-type communion, this may be regarded from outside as a failure to recognize the validity of that baptism. But from inside the gathered church this decision bears even more on the issue of Christian initiation. To give up the capacity to discern a person's status of Christian initiation is to give up the key – in fact the sole – instrumental means to *constitute* the church and maintain its identity. From this perspective, recognition of baptism can only move forward through an appreciation of its connection with the wider nexus of Christian initiation: the more explicitly other churches affirm the full dimensions of initiation, the more readily Baptist-type traditions may be able to accept their baptismal practice within that initiation.

### III

The specific issue of baptism points to a wider ecclesiological question. As already noted, this is indicated in the increasing attention given to Christian initiation in the studies focused specifically on baptism. And it is demonstrated as well in the ongoing reflection on ecclesiology itself. The text *The Nature and Mission of the Church* speaks of the believer growing in relationship with Christ and with other members of the body of Christ. "In this an infant, or upon personal confession of faith – is nourished by, and tested against, the faith of the church."<sup>19</sup> For those in the gathered church, it is only the faith of the existing members that provides the standard for that process. Initiation is precisely about the point at which one becomes part of the apostolic community that nourishes

and tests, even as one continues to be formed through word and sacrament. Initiation is crucially related to the office of oversight.

*The Nature and Mission of the Church* discusses oversight or *episkopé* in terms of its personal, communal and collegial dimensions, which receive varying emphasis in the different communions.<sup>20</sup> In treating the communal aspect, the text says "All the baptized share a responsibility for the apostolic faith and witness of the whole church."<sup>21</sup> Baptist-type traditions lean very heavily on the communal and collegial dimensions, and they place this responsibility on all the baptized in a profoundly direct way. *Nature and Mission* notes a number of continuing disagreements in regard to baptism, such as "whether baptism is best understood as effecting the reality of new life in Christ, or as reflecting it."<sup>22</sup> This is an important difference. But let us suppose for a moment that those who do not practise infant baptism were to agree that in a mysterious and hidden way someone baptized without his or her personal confession is, in that act, objectively oriented towards life in Christ. This still would not change the concern that this effect is not yet sufficiently manifest to allow such persons (with no further test) to take up responsibility for the substance of the faith into which others will be baptized.

This ecclesiological question bears finally on the nature of unity. If communions with a "gathered church" ecclesiology conclude that such an ecclesiology is not a necessary pattern for all Christians, can that ecclesiology find a place within a united church? At the very least, this would require an understanding of unity that provided for varied ecclesial modes. This question is of burning urgency in relation to that growing party of Christians (as noted in the Joint Working Group document on baptism) who see baptism as the consequence of entry into relation with Christ, rather than as the gateway to it. In ecclesial terms, this means that the church as the community of the baptized has the character of a community of visible disciples. Such a church entrusts both its apostolic character and the responsibilities of oversight into the collective hands of its membership, and does not bind those hands with elements that may

be regarded as essential in other Christian traditions, elements such as fixed liturgies or the regular use of historic creeds. The question of the mutual recognition of baptism between gathered churches and the majority traditions is ultimately a question about whether two modes of ecclesiology can exist in unity.

It is a fruit of the BEM process that we have now come to a point where we can pose this possibility much more concretely. Somewhat provocatively we might ask whether in such unity the gathered churches could exist within the one church somewhat as religious orders have existed within individual communions. Those in such communities do not live a "higher" Christian life, nor do they have any different set of essentials for the Christian life than those in other contexts. But they do have a charism or distinctive calling as apostolic faith, but this particular group constitutes the form in which it is lived out. The community has a distinctive composition, defined by the fact that each of its members has made a manifest personal commitment and taken on a role of responsibility in maintaining the community's fidelity.

Ecumenical dialogue has made it clear to many of us in the gathered church tradition that it is incumbent upon our "free churches" to demonstrate that we can participate in acts of common confession with the wider church. A reciprocal development would be for other Christian traditions to consider whether there are ways to understand the mutual recognition of baptism that would preserve the distinctive strengths of gathered church ecclesiology. This is a conversation that has only begun, but its benefits will extend far beyond the question of baptism alone.

## NOTES

1. The same can be said to some extent for other theological topics of the Apostolic Faith study. See *Confessing One Faith: Towards an Ecumenical Explanation of the Apostolic Faith as Expressed in the Niene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (381),

Commission on Faith and Order, Faith and Order Paper No. 140, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1987.

2. For the Lutheran-Reformed agreement, see "A Formula of Agreement" at [www.pcusa.org/ecumenicalrelations/resources/orderly-exchange.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/ecumenicalrelations/resources/orderly-exchange.pdf). For the Lutheran-Episcopal agreement see "Called to Common Mission" at [www.elca.org/ecumenical/fullcommunion/Episcopal/CCMresources/text.html](http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/fullcommunion/Episcopal/CCMresources/text.html).

3. For a brief report on the study group's early work, see "Problems with the Meaning of Full Communion" at [www.nccusa.org/unity/fandowards.html](http://www.nccusa.org/unity/fandowards.html), National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, O.C. Edwards, 2005.

4. *Confessing the One Faith: Towards an Ecumenical Explanation of the Apostolic Faith as Expressed in the Niene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (381), Faith and Order Paper No. 153, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1991.

5. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2005.

6. A representative expression of these concerns can be found in *Koinonia and Justice, Peace, and Creation: costly unity: presentations and reports from the World Council of Churches' consultation in Rønne, Denmark, February 1993*, ed. by Thomas F. Best and W. Granberg-Michaelson, Geneva, World Council of Churches Unit III and Unit I, 1993.

7. The concerns noted thus far were an important impetus for the so-called "Princeton Proposal" which expressed a concern about a weakening in the search for visible unity. See *In one body through the cross: the Princeton proposal for Christian unity: a call to the churches from an ecumenical study group*, Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans, 2004. *The ecumenical future: background papers for In one body through the Cross: the Princeton proposal for Christian unity*, ed. by Carl E. Bratton and Robert W. Jensen, Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans, 2003. See also M. Kinnaman, "Can These Bones Live?", in *Christian Century* 120, 2003.

8. This was the Ditchingham consultation in 1994. See Thomas F. Best, D. Heller, et al., *So we believe, so we pray: towards koinonia in worship*, Faith and Order Paper No. 171, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1995.

9. See Thomas F. Best and D. Heller, *Becoming a Christian: the ecumenical implications of our common baptism*, Faith and Order Paper No. 184, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1999.

10. See "Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism: a JWG Study", *Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, Eighth Report 1999-2005*, Geneva-Rome, WCC Publications, 2005, Appendix C, pp. 45-72.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

12. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982, p.6.
13. *Ibid.*
14. This is reflected in the title of the document from the Prague consultation, "Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism," and the title of the Faverge II study document, "One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition of Christian Initiation". In the most recent version of this document, "Christian initiation" has been dropped from the title, but the substance of the concern remains in the text. See "One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition" at [www.wolkomene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2fo2006\\_14\\_onebaptism-en.pdf](http://www.wolkomene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2fo2006_14_onebaptism-en.pdf). This text-in-process, which is not yet an official text of the Faith and Order Commission, is available in "Minutes of the Standing Commission on Faith and Order, 12-19 June 2007, Crans-Montana, Switzerland", Faith and Order Paper No. 206, Geneva, Faith and Order, 2007, Appendix V, pp. 57-81.
15. See G. Lathrop, "The Water That Speaks: The *Ordo* of Baptism and its Ecumenical Implications", in *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of our Common Baptism*, Faith and Order Paper No. 184, ed. by Thomas F. Best and D. Heller, Geneva, WCC Publications, p.17.
16. T. Lorenzen, "Baptists and Ecumenicity with Special Reference to Baptism", in *Review and Exposition* 77(1), 1980, p.22.
17. Doctrine and Worship Committee of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Believing and Being Baptized: Baptism, So-called Re-baptism and Children in the Church*, ed. by C.J. Ellis, Oxon, Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1996.
18. For a fuller discussion of this point, see S.M. Heim, "Baptismal Recognition and the Baptist Churches", in *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, ed. by M. Root and R. Saarinen, Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans, 1998, pp.150-163.
19. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2005.
20. *Ibid.* See pp.52ff.
21. *Ibid.*, pp.55-56.
22. *Ibid.*, p.46.

## A "Real though incomplete Communion through Baptism": Ecumenical Development Twenty-Five Years After *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*

Rev. John A. Radano\*

Many factors point to the greatness of the achievement of the 1982 Faith and Order convergence Text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.<sup>1</sup> Many factors point to the greatness of the achievement of BEM. These include BEM's long period of gestation (the more than 50 years of previous theological work that led to it); its reach across the world through translation into more than 35 languages; its status as the major publishing event for the WCC (more than 600,000 copies sold); the unprecedented official response to it on the part of close to 190 churches (including the Catholic Church); the processes which BEM and the responses to it have set in motion – especially a deeper study on the church which has already resulted in the publication of two significant volumes summarizing common ecumenical perspectives on the church, and the study is still in progress; the way BEM has helped change relationships among churches over these past 25 years; the unprecedented attention given to it in papal discourses and writings (John Paul II, including

in the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*). All of these factors, and more, illustrate that BEM was an unprecedented historic event.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, BEM is a convergence text, and acknowledges that there are still issues related to baptism which churches need to resolve.<sup>3</sup> Still, BEM is one of those ecumenical achievements<sup>4</sup> which, I believe, make clear that the ecumenical journey towards visible unity is irreversible despite continuing problems and new problems. So we must celebrate its silver anniversary.

### 1. Recalling BEM's description of baptism

It is good to recall, briefly, some of the teaching of BEM on baptism which illustrates how fundamental baptism is for the Christian life. In the section on "Baptism", BEM says:

- "Baptism means participating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (§3).
- "Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, in his death and in his resurrection" (§1).
- "Baptism is the sign of new life through Jesus Christ" (§2).
- BEM presents New Testament images of baptism describing baptism, for example, as
  - "participation in Christ's death and resurrection" (Rom. 6:3-5, etc.)
  - "a new birth" (John 3:5)
  - "an enlightenment by Christ" (Eph. 5:14)
  - "a renewal by the Spirit" (Titus 3:5)
  - "a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division whether of sex or race or social status are transcended" (Gal. 3:27-28, etc.).
- "The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in and after their baptism" (§5).
- Baptism is "a sign of the kingdom of God and of the life of the world to come" (§7).

- "Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift" (§8).
- "Baptism is related "... to life-long growth into Christ" (§9).
- "Administered in obedience to Our Lord, baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship" (§6).
- "Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (§17).

These are statements that most Christians today can confess together. They can also stimulate some good homilies, spiritual reflection, as well as theological discussion.

### 2. Baptism and "real though incomplete communion"

In recent years, the notion that separated Christians, especially because of baptism, live in a real though incomplete, or imperfect, communion, has gradually been received and articulated within the ecumenical movement. To illustrate, the 1964 Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II states that those "who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church". And "... all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ".<sup>5</sup>

In 1982 BEM said that baptism "unites the one baptized with Christ and with his people."<sup>6</sup> "Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity".<sup>7</sup>

The series of statements of World Council of Churches assemblies on the "nature of the unity we seek", starting with that of New Delhi (1961), mention baptism as one of the central factors in the unity we seek. The third of these statements, from the Canberra Assembly (1991), for the first time in this series of WCC

statements acknowledges that the involvement by the churches in the various aspects of the ecumenical movement, including the theological convergence they have found, has allowed the churches "to recognize a certain degree of communion already existing between them".<sup>8</sup>

Most recently, in 2005, a study published by the Joint Working Group between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches on "Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism" summarizes by saying:

In the modern ecumenical movement the gradual acknowledgment of a common understanding of baptism has been one of the most basic reasons enabling long separated Christians to speak now of sharing a real though incomplete communion.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. How real is the degree of communion achieved?

How real is the degree of communion achieved? In fact, the gradual acknowledgement of a common understanding of baptism, because of which Christians share a real though imperfect communion, has contributed to some important ecumenical achievements which have made a difference in the relationship between churches. BEM has been a contributing factor to a number of changed relationships. A brief survey of some developments in different parts of the world can illustrate this.

In Europe, new and committed relationships between churches have come into existence. For example, even before BEM the Leuenberg agreement (1973) leading to altar and pulpit fellowship between Lutheran and Reformed Churches includes, as part of the "Common Understanding of the Gospel" needed for church fellowship among them, a basic consensus regarding baptism,<sup>10</sup> even though the agreement indicates that the question of "baptismal practice" needs further study.<sup>11</sup> There are various

Anglican and Lutheran agreements assisted by BEM. For example, the Meissen Agreement (1989) between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church of Germany, and the Reuilly Agreement (2001) between the Anglican Churches (of Great Britain and Ireland) and French Lutheran and Reformed Churches. Here, "The ten agreements in faith in Meissen and the other agreements refer to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*" and various international bilateral reports.<sup>12</sup>

In the USA, the member churches of *Churches Uniting in Christ* (2002, formerly the Consultation on Church Union or COCU) have included in the theological basis for the original proposal, which has enabled them to reach the degree of communion they now share, the convergences and agreements on baptism found in BEM. And the general reception of BEM is part of the theological background of agreements of full communion in the USA such as that between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church USA.<sup>13</sup>

In Australia "the frequent references to BEM in the documents from many of the Australian dialogues is an indication of the extent to which its challenges and implications are being addressed."<sup>14</sup> The "Agreed Statement on Baptism" of the Uniting Church of Australia and the Anglican Church, for example, in its presentation of the institution of baptism, cites and endorses a paragraph from BEM for its explanation of institution.<sup>15</sup> "These documents tell an important point of the story of the growing understanding and relationship between churches in Australia."<sup>16</sup>

On a more international level, in 1989, Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Robert Runcie, stated in a common declaration that "the certain yet incomplete communion we already share" is grounded on sharing together important areas of faith including "our common baptism into Christ". The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* officially signed in 1999 by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, and officially endorsed in 2006 by the World Methodist Council, states that the reaching of the Lutheran churches and the Catholic Church



presented therein is not subject to the condemnations of the other's teaching found respectively in the Council of Trent and the Lutheran confessions of the 16th century. The declaration presents seven areas regarding justification which Catholics and Lutherans can confess together. In two of these, a common understanding of baptism is basic. One reads: "We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation which lays the basis of the whole Christian life."<sup>17</sup> The other reads that "We confess together that in Baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies and truly renews the person."<sup>18</sup>

Pope John Paul II, in the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), speaks of significant ecumenical advances that have taken place: "There is an increased awareness that we all belong to Christ." "The 'universal brotherhood' of Christians has become a firm ecumenical conviction." This is not the consequence of a vague family spirit, but rather, he says, "it is rooted in recognition of the oneness of Baptism". And specifically to our point here, today, it is fitting, he says, "to recall that the fundamental role of Baptism in building up the Church has been clearly brought out thanks to the multilateral dialogues", and he documents this with a reference to BEM.<sup>19</sup>

How real is the degree of communion achieved? A common understanding of baptism, to which BEM and other dialogues have made a significant contribution, has helped create new relationships among separated churches.

#### 4. How can we deepen the degree of communion we share?

We can suggest two ways. One way is to *resolve other related issues on which we have conflict*. Another achievement of BEM is that responses to it uncovered major issues still in need of resolution as the ecumenical journey continues. The WCC Faith and Order Commission's analysis of the responses to BEM<sup>20</sup> discerned three key issues as especially significant: (a) Scripture and Tradition; (b)

Sacraments and Sacramentality; (c) Common perspectives on ecclesiology.<sup>21</sup> On this last point Faith and Order's analysis of the responses to BEM strongly underlined as one of the major issues demanding further study that "the search for Christian unity implies the search for common ecumenical perspectives on ecclesiology."<sup>22</sup> Many responses "requested that ecclesiology be made a major study in future Faith and Order work."<sup>23</sup> This was certainly the view of the Catholic Church's response to BEM which said that:

...full agreement on the sacraments is related to agreement on the nature of the church. The sacraments, including baptism, receive their full significance and efficacy from the comprehensive ecclesial reality on which they depend and which they manifest. Nor can the goal of the unity of divided Christians be reached without agreement on the nature of the church.<sup>24</sup>

As a result, Faith and Order opened a major study on the church in 1993 and has already published two texts: *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (1998),<sup>25</sup> and *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005).<sup>26</sup> Study continues with the possibility of another, more advanced volume being published in the future. The results of this study, as further common perspectives are unfolded, should give additional reasons to say that separated Christians share significant degrees of unity. BEM lives on, also in this new study on the church.

Convergence on baptism found in BEM is an important achievement. But a common understanding of baptism is significant as well as an essential aspect of the reconstitution of unity in the one Church established by Christ. As would be expected, the text *The Nature and Mission of the Church* just mentioned, presents baptism also as an important aspect of the apostolic faith and apostolic tradition of the Church of Christ.<sup>27</sup> Agreement on baptism is a building block in our efforts to reconstitute the unity of the church. This process on ecclesiology inspired by BEM is something more to celebrate on this 25th anniversary.

A second way of deepening the degree of communion we share is to *internalize, more deeply in the life of the churches, the implications of a common understanding of baptism*. The recent Joint Working Group study "Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism"<sup>28</sup> explored the common understanding of baptism reached in modern times and listed ecumenical implications of this<sup>29</sup> which need to be taken into account. They are challenges in different ways. I will point to a few of them. They may apply to different groups in different ways.

Some have to do with immediate pastoral practices. For example:

1. BEM affirms that "Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as re-baptism must be avoided."<sup>30</sup> It is therefore desirable for the churches to seek a common affirmation that it is illegitimate as well as unnecessary to perform baptism to mark rededication to Christ, or return to the church after a break in communion, or the reception of special charismas or spiritual gifts. This is different, of course, from reaffirmation and remembrance of one's baptism which is a very proper aspect of Christian worship and spirituality.<sup>31</sup>
2. Dialogue is recommended between local authorities of the Catholic Church and of WCC member churches in the same area concerning the significance and valid celebration of baptism, and seeking to arrive at "common statements through which they express mutual recognition of baptism as well as procedures for considering cases in which doubt may arise as to the validity of a particular baptism (*cf. Directory [for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism]*, §94). Consideration might be given to developing common baptismal certificates for use by churches in the same region."<sup>32</sup>
3. Since those who received the one baptism into

Christ's one body "have also received a radical calling from God to communion with all the baptized"<sup>33</sup> the churches should seek to express the existing level of oneness in a common baptism through concrete signs of unity. For example, when appropriate, by sending and receiving representatives to be present in each other's baptism celebrations, praying regularly in our worship for the candidates for baptism and for the newly baptized in all the churches, or by "reclaiming major Christian festivals such as at Easter, Pentecost, Epiphany as common times for the celebration of baptism in our churches".<sup>34</sup>

4. The growing ecumenical convergence on baptism should be another reason that proper pastoral practices concerning baptism within each church focus continually on central matters of faith to show the close connection between baptism and faith. For example, in those communities in which godparents play a role in baptism, the criteria for choosing godparents for the one to be baptized should relate primarily to the strong faith of the prospective godparent, and not simply to social and family reasons.<sup>35</sup>

There are also ecumenical implications which may be more challenging because of significant differences still found among Christians. But the degree of convergence/agreement found on baptism should have significant impact in a number of ways. For example:

5. Since baptism has been part of the mission and construction of the church from earliest time, and the growing ecumenical convergence on baptism has helped foster new relationships between separated Christians, therefore the importance of baptism in fostering ecumenical reconciliation should be given



more visibility in the ecumenical movement. It is thus recommended that "in the formation of ecumenical instruments or structures ... such as councils of churches or similar instruments, reference to baptism should be included in the theological basis of such instruments." In the case of already existing instruments, on occasions of reviewing constitutions or by-laws "consideration might be given to including baptism as part of the theological basis" if it is not already there.<sup>36</sup>

6. And what about those Christians who give strong evangelical witness to the gospel, but whose communities in fact do not use baptismal rites. The report states that "churches which share in this growing ecumenical convergence are called to dialogue" with them about this. Such dialogue, it suggests "might well focus on the understanding of the Holy Spirit in its role in bringing persons to faith and into the church, and in the believer's life-long growth into Christ".<sup>37</sup>

7. Since Christians, as a result of the ecumenical movement have come to acknowledge a significant degree of shared communion, with baptism central to all of this, the report asks churches "not to allow practices to develop which threaten the unity they now share in respect of the *ordo*, theology and administration of baptism."<sup>38</sup> It gives two examples: the replacement of the traditional Trinitarian baptismal formula (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) with alternative language (recall that BEM reflects the consensus that "Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit");<sup>39</sup> another problematical practice is "the admission of persons to the eucharist before baptism", which is happening in different places

(recall that BEM speaks of incorporation into the Body of Christ in this way: "through Baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place").<sup>40</sup>

##### 5. A new challenge today: the changing ecumenical landscape

The Faith and Order text *The Nature and Mission of the Church* also points to significant challenges on baptism which still remain as we seek the unity of Christians. These include the difference between churches which baptize infants and those which baptize only those able to offer a personal profession of faith; the inability of some churches to recognize baptism performed by others, and the related practice of re-baptism; the question of whether baptism is best understood as effecting the reality of new life in Christ or as reflecting it.<sup>41</sup> There are other questions as well.

These questions, and especially the first – the difference between churches which baptize infants and those which baptize only those able to offer a personal profession of faith – are especially momentous today. This is because the ecumenical landscape is changing. One of the phenomena of our time is that some of the fastest growing and largest Christian communities are Pentecostal and Evangelical communities. Those communities have often stood aside from the traditional institutions of the modern ecumenical movement, often criticizing it for one reason or another. These communities often reject infant baptism. While we celebrate BEM today, and the convergences which it has presented on some of these questions, we cannot presume that BEM, and other ecumenical documents, have received the same attention in those communities.

A new challenge emerges in that of building ecumenical connections to those who have not been involved very much in the

faith and order movement or in other dialogues. There have been important dialogues between classical Pentecostals with the Catholic Church (since 1972) and more recently with the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Lutheran World Federation.<sup>42</sup> But large numbers of the Pentecostal constituency have not been touched by these dialogues.

Changes are taking place, however. The new organization, Christian Churches together in the USA (2007), includes Pentecostals and Evangelicals along with Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, Anglicans. It is an important new development. But, as I understand it, it does not yet have a Faith and Order office to deal with doctrinal differences such as those concerning baptism. The Global Christian Forum, an idea originating in the World Council of Churches but now guided by an independent continuation committee, is another initiative which has tried to bring Pentecostals and Evangelicals into deeper contact with Catholics, Orthodox, Anglican and mainline Protestant churches in different parts of the world. It has had some success in different meetings so far in Asia, Africa, Europe and the USA. Another meeting is planned for Latin America (2007). But here again doctrinal issues are not yet approached. But a beginning, at least, has been made. Engaging those communities is a major challenge today, for the deepening and expanding of the real though incomplete communion that Christians share.

## 6. Other anniversaries, another challenge

Finally, ours is a time of significant anniversaries: in 2007 the 25th anniversary of BEM; in 2008 the centenary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; in 2009 the 5th centenary of the birth of John Calvin, and the centenary of the birth of Johannes Cardinal Willebrands, one of the great modern Catholic pioneers of ecumenism; in 2010 the centenary of the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh 1910 to which many people point as a

major starting point of the modern ecumenical movement; in 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. There are others.

As we are in the midst of the ecumenical movement, a test of how deeply rooted and strong this newly acknowledged real, though incomplete, communion separated Christians now share is, is whether we can commemorate these anniversaries in a very ecumenical way.

A major test and opportunity will come in 2017, to which some refer as the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The words "Reformation" and "Counter-" (or Catholic) Reformation reflect the clashes and divisions of the sixteenth century which have lasted for four centuries. Therefore some could not easily celebrate that anniversary. But through the ecumenical movement of recent times we have sought, in dialogue, to heal those divisions and to bring the best convictions of both worlds into the service of the one gospel of Jesus Christ.

While dialogue continues on divergences which still exist, could not Catholics, Protestants and Anglicans, on the basis of the significant progress already made, find ways to observe that anniversary ecumenically, in a way that gives priority to the ecumenical achievements of the last century, and gives priority to the bonds of communion we share? The real though imperfect communion that exists, especially because of a common understanding of baptism, has been supported by other significant agreements: on justification, on Christology; by significant convergences on the understanding of the eucharist; by the growing convergences on the nature of the church, and on other important aspects of Christian life.

Are all of these developments enough to say, on the eve of that anniversary of the Reformation, that a shift is taking place in which we can acknowledge, today, that the dominant context in which we live is no longer that of the sixteenth century, but that of the modern ecumenical movement? Can we not describe the relationship today, between long-divided Christians, more by the degrees of unity we share, than by the division with which we have

struggled for centuries, even though we acknowledge that our unity is not perfect?

We celebrate, today, BEM's contribution to the real though incomplete communion that we share. But the achievement of BEM encourages us to continue to seek the unity of the disciples of Christ for which the Lord prayed on the night before he died (cf. John 17:21).

## NOTES

\*This paper was presented at the Plenary meeting of the Commission on Christian Unity of the Massachusetts Council of Churches, May, 2007. The Commission had chosen for this meeting to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BEM.

1. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982.
2. Cf. Max Thurian, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (The 'Lima Text')", *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. by Nicholas Lossky et al., 2nd edition, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2002, pp.90-93.
3. "Baptism", §6, Commentary; §13, Commentary.
4. Others would be, for example, the establishment of the World Council of Churches; the Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, the 1965 Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I calling for erasing from the memory and midst of their churches the events of 1054 which are obstacles to *rapprochement*; the common Christological declarations between the Popes and the Patriarchs of Oriental Orthodox churches.
5. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.
6. "Baptism", §2.
7. "Baptism", §6.
8. The Canberra Statement: "The Unity of the Church As *Koinonia*: Gift and Calling", in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia. Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, [Santiago de Compostela 1993], ed. by Thomas F. Best and Günther Gasmann, Faith and Order Paper No. 166, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1994, §1.3, p.269.
9. "Ecological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism: a JWGC Study", in *Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, Eighth Report 1999-2005*, Geneva-Rome, WCC Publications, 2005, Appendix C, pp.45-72; citation, §5, p.46.

10. *Agreement between Reformation Churches in Europe (Lening Agreement, 1973)*, Frankfurt am Main, Verlag Otto Lembeck, 1993, §14.
11. *Lening Agreement*, §39.
12. "Report of Eighth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues" in *Eighth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues: the Implications of Regional Bilateral Agreements for the International Dialogues of Christian World Communions*, Faith and Order Paper No. 190, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2002, p.57.
13. Cf. "Report of Eighth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues".
14. *Stages on the Way: Documents from the Bilateral Conversations between Churches in Australia*, ed. by Raymond K. Williamson, Melbourne, The Joint Board of Christian Education, 1994, "Introduction", p.9.
15. *Ibid.*, p.145.
16. R. Williamson, "Preface", in *Stages on the Way: Documents from the Bilateral Conversations between Churches in Australia*, p.6.
17. Joint Declaration citation, §25.
18. All of these examples and more are found in the 2005 JWGC document "Ecological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism", §28 and generally §§25-28.
19. Cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 42, note 71.
20. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, Faith and Order Paper No. 149, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1990.
21. There is an interesting parallel to these in the five "areas in need of further study" found in the encyclical of John Paul II *Ut Unum Sint*, 79. These are first, the relationship of Sacred Scripture as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred tradition as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God. The second and third have to do with Sacrament: the Eucharist and "Ordination as a Sacrament". The fourth relates to a specific issue of the Church: "the Magisterium of the Church..." The Pope mentions a fifth issue: "The Virgin Mary, as Mother of God and Icon of the Church".
22. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990, op.cit.*, p.147.
23. *Ibid.*, p.148, emphasis original.
24. The Roman Catholic Church's response to BEM, in *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vol. VI, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Paper No. 144, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1988, pp.1-40, citation, p.40.
25. *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 181, Geneva, WCC/Faith and Order, 1998.
26. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2005.
27. *Ibid.*, §§71, 74-77.

28. "Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism: a JWGS Study", in *op. cit.*, pp.45-72.
29. *Ibid.*, §§100-110.
30. "Baptism", §13.
31. See "Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism: a JWGS Study", *op. cit.*, §101.
32. *Ibid.*, cf. §103.
33. *Ibid.*, cf. §104.
34. *Ibid.*, cf. §104.
35. *Ibid.*, cf. §106.
36. *Ibid.*, cf. §102.
37. *Ibid.*, cf. §110.
38. *Ibid.*, cf. §109.
39. "Baptism", §17.
40. "Baptism", §6; cf. "Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism: a JWGS Study", *op. cit.*, §109.
41. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the way to a Common Statement*, in the complementary Faith and Order text-in-progress "One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition", publication forthcoming.
42. See for example *Growth in Agreement III*, ed. by Jeff Gros, Thomas F. Best, and Lorelei Fuchs, Faith and Order Paper No. 204, Geneva and Grand Rapids, MI, WCC Publications and William B. Eerdmans, 2007, pp.477-497.

## The Eucharistic Dynamic of BEM

Dr Geoffrey Wainwright

The historical course of Christianity in the twentieth century was strongly marked by the Ecumenical Movement and the Liturgical Movement, and often these currents for the recovery of the Church's unity and the renewal of its worship flowed together. Itself a late-comer to official ecumenism, the Roman Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council, in session between 1962 and 1965, by that time attributed the two intermingling streams to a common source: the Holy Spirit. The conciliar decree on "the restoration of unity among all Christians" used liturgical tones in its opening sketch of ecumenism:

In recent times the Lord of the Ages has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians sorrow over their divisions and a longing for unity. Everywhere large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day a movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians. Taking part in this movement, which is called ecumenical, are those who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour. They do this not merely as individuals but also as members of the corporate groups in which they have heard the Gospel,

and which each regards as his Church and indeed, God's. And yet, almost everyone, though in different ways, longs for the one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God. (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1)

For its part, Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy declared that "zeal for the promotion and restoration of the liturgy is rightly held to be a sign of the providential dispositions of God in our time, a movement of the Holy Spirit in his Church" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 43); and, while having the Catholic Church principally in view, that very first document to be promulgated from the Council saw liturgical renewal as serving causes that were widely shared in the modern ecumenical movement which the Roman Catholic Church was now somewhat belatedly joining:

This Sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our times those institutions that are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of humanity into the household of the Church. The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy. (SC, 1)

Nowhere was the confluence between liturgy and ecumenism more obvious than in the Faith and Order text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), and most particularly in the section on "Eucharist" – its composition, its content, and its effects. The present writing seeks to highlight the dynamism inherent in its history, its substance, its reception, and its influence, while pointing also to themes that still need attention and to some practical results that may still be awaited and worked for. Attention will also be paid

to the so-called "Lima Liturgy". Although this never enjoyed the same degree of authorization as came to the "convergence text" itself by virtue of the unanimous vote in favor of BEM by the Faith and Order Commission in January 1982, the rite celebrated at the conclusion of the Lima meeting was taken up elsewhere when ecclesiastical circumstances allowed, and the welcome given it was at least a sign of a widespread longing for a common eucharist when doctrinal consensus and canonical agreements would permit that.

Since it is not possible to survey the entire confessional front, I shall not attempt to hide – either constructively or critically – my own Methodist allegiance in matters concerning the acceptance of the section of BEM on "Eucharist" and the challenges it still represents.

### Ecumenical history: the preparation of BEM, "Eucharist"

The eucharist figured on the agenda right from the first World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne in 1927. The report records a broad measure of agreement in rather general terms:

We believe that in the Holy Communion our Lord is present, that we have fellowship with God our Father in Jesus Christ his Son, our living Lord, who is our one Bread, given for the life of the world, sustaining the life of all his people, and that we are in fellowship with all others who are united to him. We agree that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the Church's most sacred act of worship, in which the Lord's atoning death is commemorated and proclaimed, and that it is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and an act of solemn self-oblation.

However, the report also mentions

divergent views, especially as to (1) the mode and manner of the presence of our Lord; (2) the conception of

the commemoration and the sacrifice; (3) the relation of the elements to the grace conveyed; and (4) the relation between the minister of this sacrament and the validity and efficacy of the rite.

The report concludes:

We are aware that the reality of the divine presence and gift in this sacrament cannot be adequately apprehended by human thought or expressed in human language. We close this statement with the prayer that the differences which prevent full communion at the present time may be removed.

Already at Lausanne, therefore, one finds a framework for *rapprochement* among the churches, a location of the neuralgic points of controversy, and a declaration of the goal for the process to be undertaken.

The second World Conference on Faith and Order, held in Edinburgh in 1937, registered some progress in connection with the eucharist:

The important thing is that we should celebrate the Eucharist with the unfailing use of bread and wine, and of prayer, and of the words of institution, and with agreements as to its essential and spiritual meaning.

These last were then at least sketched in the following terms:

If sacrifice is understood as it was by our Lord and his followers and in the early Church, it includes, not his death only, but the obedience of his earthly ministry, and his risen and ascended life, in which he still does his Father's will and ever liveth to make intercession for us. Such a sacrifice can never be repeated, but is proclaimed and set forth in the eucharistic action of the whole Church when we come to God in Christ at the Eucharist

or Lord's Supper. For us, the secret of joining in that sacrifice is both the worship and service of God; corporate because we are joined to Christ, and in him to each other (1 Cor. 10:17); individual, because each one of us makes the corporate act of self-oblation his own; and not ceremonial only, but also profoundly ethical because the keynote of all sacrifice and offering is "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God" [cf. Hebrews 10:7, 9]. We believe also that the Eucharist is the supreme moment of prayer because the Lord is the celebrant or minister for us at every celebration, and it is in his prayers for God's gifts and for us all that we join. According to the New Testament accounts of the institution, his prayer is itself a giving of thanks; so that the Lord's Supper is both a *verbum visibile* of the divine grace, and the supreme thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) of the people of God. We are throughout in the realm of Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit that the blessing and the gift are given. The presence, which we do not try to define, is a spiritual presence. We begin from the historical fact of the Incarnation in the power of the Holy Spirit, and we are already moving forward to the complete spiritual reality of the coming of the Lord and the life of the heavenly city.

The most important points to note here are the recognition of both the downward and the upward movement in the Lord's supper or eucharist (from God and to God), the conjunction of Christ's sacrifice and ours in him, the pneumatological dimension of the sacrament (an Orthodox emphasis but also found in Calvin), and the opening of the eschatological prospect.

After the Second World War, the third World Conference on Faith and Order took place in Lund in 1952. It confronted the three still necessary "comparative" studies produced by theological commissions on themes bequeathed by the Edinburgh



Conference: "The Nature of the Church", "Ways of Worship", and "Intercommunion". But the Lund Conference itself initiated a transmutation in methodology:

We have seen clearly that we can make no real advance towards unity if we only compare our several conceptions of the nature of the Church and the traditions in which they are embodied. But once again it has proved true that as we seek to draw closer to Christ we come closer to one another. We need, therefore, to penetrate behind our divisions to a deeper and richer understanding of the mystery of the God-given union of Christ with his Church. We need increasingly to realize that the separate histories of our churches find their full meaning only if seen in the perspective of God's dealings with his whole people.

Instead of talking to one another around the circumference of a circle, the churches were henceforth to move in towards its centre. The methodological shift was consolidated at the fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, held in Montreal in 1963. Particularly significant was the work on "Scripture, Tradition, and traditions", which coincided in time – and to a considerable degree in substance – with the Vatican II constitution on revelation *Dei Verbum*. On all sides, Scripture is seen as the internal norm of Tradition, while Tradition constitutes the indispensable context for interpreting the Scriptures. Despite differing nuances among the collaborators, BEM operates within that perspective.

From the report of the commission on "Intercommunion" the Lund Conference in 1952 adopted a paragraph that became basic to the sustained work on the eucharist when it was resumed at the plenary meeting of the Commission on Faith and Order at Aarhus (Denmark) in 1964:

This dominical sacrament of Christ's body and blood, controlled by the words of institution, with the use of

the appointed elements of bread and wine, is: (a) a memorial of Christ's incarnation and earthly ministry, of his death and resurrection; (b) a sacrament in which he is truly present to give himself to us, uniting us to himself, to his eternal sacrifice, and to one another; and (c) eschatologically, an anticipation of our fellowship with Christ in his eternal kingdom.

Meanwhile nuances had been added at Montreal in 1963:

In the Holy Eucharist or Lord's Supper, constantly repeated and always including both word and sacrament, we proclaim and celebrate a memorial of the saving acts of God (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

What God did in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, he does not do again. The events are unique; they cannot be repeated or extended or continued. Yet in this memorial we do not only recall past events; God makes them present through the Holy Spirit who takes of the things of Christ and declares them to us [cf. John 16:15], thus making us participants in Christ...

The Lord's Supper, a gift of God to his Church, is a sacrament of the presence of the crucified and glorified Christ until he comes, and a means whereby the sacrifice of the cross, which we proclaim, is operative within the Church. In the Lord's Supper the members of the body of Christ are sustained in their unity with their Head and Saviour who offered himself on the cross; by him, with him and in him who is our great High Priest and Intercessor we offer to the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, our praise, thanksgiving and intercession. With contrite hearts we offer ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice, a sacrifice which must be expressed in the whole of our daily lives. Thus united to our Lord, and to the Church triumphant, and in fellowship with the

whole Church on earth, we are renewed in the covenant sealed by the blood of Christ. In the Supper we also anticipate the marriage-supper of the Lamb in the Kingdom of God.

From Aarhus in 1964, Jean-Jacques von Allmen was commissioned to write his *Essai sur le Repas du Seigneur*.<sup>1</sup> A special part was played by Brother Max Thurian of the Taizé Community, and the influence of his own *L'Eucharistie – mémorial du Seigneur, sacrifice d'action de grâce et d'intercession*<sup>2</sup> was considerable. My own association with the future BEM began with my attendance at Aarhus as a youth delegate, looking for the subject of a doctoral dissertation; the eventual result was my book *Eucharist and Eschatology*.<sup>3</sup> The longest period of preparation work on what became BEM proceeded under the active aegis of Lukas Vischer, director of Faith and Order (1965-1979).<sup>4</sup>

A first full draft of "Eucharist" figured in *One Baptism, One Eucharist, and a Mutually Recognized Ministry*, approved by the Plenary Commission on Faith and Order at Accra (Ghana) in 1974, and then sent to the churches by the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Nairobi 1975) for comment and revision. More than 150 responses were received in Geneva. Further work in the Commission was guided by a "core group", which also listened to contributions from individual theologians. Of the three sections of BEM it was "Eucharist" which required the least adjustment. A near-final version was brought to the Plenary Commission at Lima in January 1982.

After consideration of a last round of proposed minor amendments and some final redactory sessions (which I chaired), the Commission unanimously voted the text as "mature" for transmission to the churches with request for official response to questions concerning

the extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages; the consequences your church can draw from this text for its

relations and dialogues with other churches, particularly with those other churches which also recognize the text as an expression of the apostolic faith; the guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness; the suggestions your church can make for the ongoing work of Faith and Order as it relates the material of this text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry to its long-range research project "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today".

Into the making of the official responses went not only discussions in synods but the interest gratifyingly displayed in many places at parish level (for, after all, BEM treated matters that Christian communities encounter Sunday by Sunday). The 186 official responses were published in six volumes,<sup>5</sup> and an analysis by the "core group" formed the heart of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990 – Report on the Process and Responses*.<sup>6</sup>

### Sacramental theology: the substance of BEM, "Eucharist"

The period of BEM's preparation was a time in which sacramental theology benefited from other developments on the scholarly front. Dogmatics witnessed "the ecumenical rediscovery of the Trinity",<sup>7</sup> beginning on the Protestant side with Karl Barth's *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (1932-1968) and strengthened by contributions from Orthodoxy reaching the West. Biblical theology latched on to the notion of "*anawais*" and its Hebrew rootage in "ZKR", which allowed "memorial" to transcend a merely psychological remembrance and be understood rather as a divinely instituted rite whereby successive generations of worshippers were brought – before God – into touch with decisive events in the history of God with the world. The patristic revival uncovered common ground in doctrine and worship behind the separations of the sixteenth,



eleventh, and even fifth centuries. Liturgies became established as a discipline with theological and pastoral incidences beyond mere canonical "rubricism". Humanistic studies in linguistic philosophy and cultural anthropology helped sacramental theologians to recover an account of effective symbols that work transformatively on reality, rather than being merely distant pointers to an abstract truth.

In expounding "The Meaning of the Eucharist" ("Eucharist", §§2-26), "Eucharist" begins soteriologically, thus ensuring the priority of the "downward" movement:

The eucharist is essentially the sacrament of the gift which God makes to us in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian receives this gift of salvation through communion in the body and blood of Christ. ("Eucharist", §2)

The way is then open for a fivefold structure in which the themes follow the order of the Apostles' and Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creeds: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Church, Kingdom. This sequence corresponds quite nicely, too, to the development of ideas in the "West-Syrian" (Antiochene-Byzantine) pattern of anaphora which exercised great influence on the revision and new composition of eucharistic prayers in the latter part of the twentieth century, both in the Roman Catholic Church (notably Eucharistic Prayer IV) and in many Anglican and Protestant denominations.

Under "The Eucharist as Thanksgiving to the Father", BEM – with reference to past, present and future – sees thanks offered to God

for everything accomplished in creation, redemption and sanctification, for everything accomplished by God now in the Church and in the world in spite of the sins of human beings, for everything that God will accomplish

in bringing the Kingdom to fulfilment. ("Eucharist", §3)

Matching the increasing ecological awareness and concern that marked the late twentieth century, the text recognizes to the eucharist a cosmic dimension that had not always been prominent in liturgical history and sacramental theology, although that dimension is clearly present in Scripture and in Jewish prayers (cf. 1 Timothy 4:4-5):

The eucharist is the great sacrifice of praise by which the Church speaks on behalf of the whole creation. For the world which God reconciled is present at every eucharist: in the bread and wine, in the persons of the faithful, and in the prayers they offer for themselves and for all people... The bread and wine, fruits of the earth and human labour, are presented to the Father in faith and thanksgiving. ("Eucharist", §4)

And then, continuing in nicely trinitarian vein:

The eucharist thus signifies what the world is to become: an offering and hymn of praise to the Creator, a universal communion in the body of Christ, a kingdom of justice, love and peace in the Holy Spirit. ("Eucharist", §4)

Under "The Eucharist as Anamnesis or Memorial of Christ", the emphasis falls on the redemptive work of the Incarnate Son: "United to our Lord and in communion with all the saints and martyrs, we are renewed in the covenant sealed by the blood of Christ" ("Eucharist", §11). Here the recovered strength of the biblical notion of "memorial" becomes apparent, with reference to the "present efficacy of God's work when it is celebrated by God's people in a liturgy" ("Eucharist", §5): Christ's action in and through the celebration makes of the eucharist "not only a calling to mind of what is past and its significance. It is the Church's effective

proclamation of God's mighty acts and promises. Representation and anticipation are expressed in thanksgiving and intercession" ("Eucharist", §§7-8).

It is in this part of the exposition that the historically most controversial themes of Christ's presence and sacrifice are treated. First, sacrifice: it is clearly stated that the events of Christ's earthly sacrifice "are unique and can neither be repeated nor prolonged" ("Eucharist", §8). In their responses, both Catholics and Protestants agree that that is the case. The tendency to interpret Christ's continuing work predominantly in terms of prayerful intercession was, however, judged inadequate by Catholic and Orthodox responses. In his encyclical letter of 2003 *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* *Vivit*, Pope John Paul II considered it necessary to remind Catholics that the eucharist should not be "stripped of its sacrificial meaning" and "celebrated as if it were simply a fraternal banquet"; nor should "the necessity of the ministerial priesthood" be "obscured" in such a way that the "sacramental nature of the Eucharist is reduced to its mere effectiveness as a form of proclamation" (10); rather, the eucharist is "the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated down the ages", making "Christ's one, definitive redemptive sacrifice" – which "participates in the divine eternity" – "always present in time" for its benefits to be received as the faithful "offer themselves in union with the sacrifice of Christ" (11-14).

As to Christ's presence, there was practically unanimous acclaim in the responses to BEM for the sentence "The Church confesses Christ's real, living and active presence in the eucharist" ("Eucharist", §13); but some Protestants expressed unease at the claim that "Christ's mode of presence in the eucharist is unique" (*ibid.*), lest a qualitative superiority be thereby recognized to that mode among "the variety of ways" in which "Christ fulfills ... his promise to be always with his own even to the end of the world" (*ibid.*). The commentary to "Eucharist", §13 related the controversial issue thus:

Many churches believe that by the words of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine of the

eucharist become, in a real though mysterious manner, the body and blood of the risen Christ, i.e., of the living Christ present in all his fullness. Under the signs of bread and wine, the deepest reality is the total being of Christ who comes to us in order to feed us and transform our entire being. Some other churches, while affirming a real presence of Christ at the eucharist, do not link that presence so definitely with the signs of bread and wine. The decision remains for the churches whether this difference can be accommodated within the convergence formulated in the text itself.

Some churches were so content; others – from both sides – were not.

Under "The Eucharist as Invocation of the Spirit", the benefits of Eastern Orthodox insistence on the liturgical "*epiklesis*" are traced. The pneumatological emphasis is properly placed within a trinitarian framework:

The bond between the eucharistic celebration and the mystery of the Triune God reveals the role of the Holy Spirit as that of the One who makes the historical words of Jesus present and alive. Being assured by Jesus' promise in the words of institution that it will be answered, the Church prays to the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit in order that the eucharistic event may be a reality: the real presence of the crucified and risen Christ giving his life for all humanity. ("Eucharist", §14)

In fact, "the whole action of the eucharist has an 'epikletic' character because it depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit" ("Eucharist", §16); it has, however, to be admitted that "in the words of the liturgy, this aspect of the eucharist finds varied expression" (*ibid.*). In connection with associated historic controversies, the commentary to "Eucharist", §14 notes that

in the early liturgies the whole 'prayer action' was thought of as bringing about the reality promised by Christ. The

invocation of the Spirit was made both on the community and on the elements of bread and wine. Recovery of such an understanding may help us overcome difficulties concerning a special moment of consecration.

Certainly, followers of Calvin were pleased by the attention to pneumatology, since the Reformer had regarded the Holy Spirit as "the link" (*le lien*) between the earthly action and the heavenly action in the sacrament;<sup>8</sup> and, while several Lutheran responses feared for the sufficiency of "the Word", the Bavarian Church recognized that "in [the efficacy of the Holy Ghost] we see expressed that the Church does not control the gift of the sacrament, but entreats the presence of God. This wards off at the same time a magical understanding of the speaking of the *verba testamenti*."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, BEM sees the eucharistic work of the Spirit as both ecclesiological and eschatological in its range and effects:

The Church, as the community of the new covenant, confidently invokes the Spirit, in order that it may be sanctified and renewed, led into all justice, truth and unity, and empowered to fulfil its mission in the world.

("Eucharist", §17)

The Holy Spirit through the eucharist gives a foretaste of the Kingdom of God: the Church receives the life of the new creation and the assurance of the Lord's return.

("Eucharist", §18)

Under "The Eucharist as Communion of the Faithful", ecclesiology comes into its own, both in respect of the inner life and structures of the church and in regard to the church's presence, witness and service in the world – and indeed the tone here becomes challenging in the face of disunity among Christians and their respective communities and its "inconsistency" with "the reconciling presence of God in human history":

The sharing in one bread and the common cup in a given place demonstrates and effects the oneness of the sharers

with Christ and with their fellow sharers in all times and places. It is in the eucharist that the community of God's people is fully manifested. Eucharistic celebrations always have to do with the whole Church, and the whole Church is involved in each local eucharistic celebration. In so far as a church claims to be a manifestation of the whole Church, it will take care to order its own life in ways that take seriously the interests and concerns of other churches. ("Eucharist", §19)

The eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life (Matt. 5:23f.; 1 Cor. 10:16; 1 Cor. 11:20-22; Gal. 3:28). All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ... [W]e are placed under continual judgment by the persistence of unjust relationships of all kinds in our society, the manifold divisions on account of human pride, material interest and power politics and, above all, the obstinacy of unjustifiable confessional oppositions within the body of Christ. ("Eucharist", §20)<sup>10</sup>

Many responses warmed to this "prophetic" word in its social and political dimensions, but perhaps fewer among the divided "churches" have perceived or realized the potential of a eucharistic model for the recovery of full visible ecclesial unity (on which more later).

Under "The Eucharist as Meal of the Kingdom", the eschatological tension is respected between "the already" and "the not yet": "The eucharist opens up the vision of the divine rule which has been promised as the final renewal of creation, and is a foretaste of it" ("Eucharist", §22). With some echo of St Paul's definition of the Kingdom of God at Romans 14:17 (and cf. already "Eucharist",

§4, quoted above), the text declares that "the Church gives thanks" for all the "signs of this renewal" which are present in the world wherever the grace of God is manifest and human beings work for *justice*, love and *peace*" and at the eucharist "joyfully celebrates and anticipates the coming of the Kingdom of Christ" (*ibid.*, emphases added). As "entirely the gift of God", the eucharist "brings into the present age a new reality which transforms Christians into the image of Christ and therefore makes them into his effective witnesses".

The eucharist is precious food for missionaries, bread and wine for pilgrims on their apostolic journey. The eucharistic community is nourished and strengthened for confessing by word and action the Lord Jesus Christ who gave his life for the salvation of the world. ("Eucharist", §26)

It is soberly recognized that "insofar as Christians cannot unite in full fellowship around the same table to eat the same loaf and drink from the same cup, their missionary witness is weakened at both the individual and the corporate levels" (*ibid.*).

### Liturgical enactment: the eucharistic rite in BEM, "Eucharist"

Under "The Celebration of the Eucharist", our document then treats the ritual practicalities. The role of the Liturgical Movement is recognized in having "brought the churches closer together in the manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper" ("Eucharist", §28). Three instances may be given.<sup>11</sup> In the English-speaking world, a landmark was the *Order for the Lord's Supper or the Holy Eucharist* (1954) composed in and for the Church of South India, which had been constituted in 1947 as the organic union of Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Within a reconstructed framework from the Anglican/Methodist tradition,

this liturgy integrated features also from the Reformed, Syrian, and even Mozarabic rites; it was one of the first to reintroduce a regular Old Testament reading alongside Epistle and Gospel, the gesture of an "exchange of peace" among the entire assembly, and a much fuller "eucharistic prayer" than had been customary among the constituent partners.

Second, mention must be made of *Eucharistie à Taizé* (1959), composed in and for the monastic community of Taizé, which was an ecumenical beacon in post-war Europe. Principally the work of Brother Max Thurian, the ritual structure of the Taizé eucharist may be described as a clarified version of the dominant classical rite of the West – and thus (coming remarkably from the Reformed side) an anticipation of the liturgical revision in the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II. Our third instance, in fact, is the Roman Mass of 1969–70, for which a fuller course of Scripture readings is provided, the homily is viewed as "part of the liturgy itself", and a much greater use of the vernacular is allowed.

It was affirmed from an early point in "Eucharist" that the eucharist "always includes both word and sacrament" ("Eucharist", §3). As "essentially a single whole", the eucharistic liturgy is then outlined in "Eucharist", §27 as "consisting historically" of certain features "in varying sequence and of diverse importance":

- hymns of praise;
- acts of repentance;
- declaration of pardon;
- proclamation of the Word of God, in various forms;
- confession of faith (creed);
- intercession for the whole Church and for the world;
- preparation of the bread and wine;
- thanksgiving to the Father for the marvels of creation, redemption and sanctification;
- the words of Christ's institution of the sacrament according to the New Testament tradition;
- the *anamnesis* or memorial of the great acts of

redemption, passion, death, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, which brought the Church into being; – the invocation of the Holy Spirit (*epiklesis*) on the community, and the elements of bread and wine (either before the words of institution or after the memorial, or both; or some other reference to the Holy Spirit which adequately expresses the 'epikletic' character of the eucharist);

- consecration of the faithful to God;
- reference to the communion of saints;
- prayer for the return of the Lord and the definitive manifestation of his Kingdom;
- the Amen of the whole community;
- sign of reconciliation and peace;
- the breaking of the bread;
- eating and drinking in communion with Christ and with each member of the Church;
- final act of praise;
- blessing and sending.

"Eucharist", §27 might have been firmer in declaring readings from the Scriptures and the homily or sermon to be by far the most normal forms of "the proclamation of the Word"; it might also have been bolder in placing under the heading of "Eucharistic Prayer" the items stretching from "thanksgiving to the Father" as far as "the Amen of the whole community", for the recovery of such a unified "Great Thanksgiving" has been very widespread in liturgical revision and renewal.<sup>12</sup> While "a common eucharistic faith does not imply uniformity in either liturgy or practice", the churches are urged by BEM to "test their liturgies in the light of the eucharistic agreement now in process of attainment" ("Eucharist", §28).

At the conclusion of the meeting of the Faith and Order Commission at which the text of BEM was finalized in January 1982, the eucharist was celebrated according to a rite that did not claim the same status as the "doctrinal" text itself but could

nevertheless be seen as *one* way of embodying the emerging agreements. The principal celebrant at Lima was Robert Wright, a priest of the Episcopal Church in the USA, joined by as wide a variety of ministers from other bodies as canonical regulations could be stretched to allow. The Orthodox and Catholic members of the Commission voiced their sorrow that ecclesial conditions did not allow them to receive communion. Largely from the hand of Max Thurian, the liturgy bore a heavy thematic concentration on baptism, eucharist, and ministry, which was appropriate to the occasion but not suited to prolonged employment in other circumstances. Consequently, the so-called "Lima Liturgy" underwent adaptations for use on other significant ecumenical occasions, notably as "The Feast of Life" at the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC in 1983, which met under the banner of "Jesus Christ, the Life of the World".<sup>13</sup> The widespread welcome that greeted the provision of such a text as the Lima Liturgy – and its local use – serves at least to indicate the desire for a liturgy that can mark the long and complex way towards the attainment of full visible unity.<sup>14</sup>

In May 1995, "a community of liturgists, theologians, church musicians, pastors and others" gathered at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in order to "reflect on – and look beyond – one of the phenomena of the modern ecumenical movement: the eucharistic service known as the Lima liturgy."<sup>15</sup> The organizers set the context with respect to the Lima Liturgy thus:

The Lima liturgy has evoked an immediate and growing response, one far beyond any expectations of those who had crafted it. It has corresponded to, and resonated with, such a widespread and deep-seated hunger among Christians in the separated churches that it has been widely used for eucharistic worship at countless ecumenical events, from parish level to WCC assemblies. Offering a dignified and rich eucharistic service, it draws on a wide range of liturgical resources in a way that is both respectful of the tradition and open to the future. It



has led many Christians to a deeper understanding of the Lord's supper as a liturgical event rooted in the life of the church and its tradition. It has stimulated discussion among liturgists about the form and content of the eucharistic event. And not least – though this was far from the original intent – it has posed a challenge to the churches: unofficial it may be, but the extent and depth of the response and depth it has evoked calls the churches to urgent further work on the issues which keep so many of us divided at the Lord's table.<sup>16</sup>

The aim of the May 1995 "seminar and workshop" was amplified as:

first, to review and reflect upon the experience gained by the churches in using the Lima liturgy since its introduction in 1982, to consider this experience from both the theological and liturgical points of view, and in the light of this to suggest principles for eucharistic celebrations in ecumenical settings; and second, to produce such new material for use in the churches and especially, where possible according to church discipline, in ecumenical contexts.<sup>17</sup>

The theological and liturgical themes that emerged at the meeting were three: "the shape of the eucharistic liturgy, the importance of liturgical inculturation, and the content of eucharistia at the table of the Lord."<sup>18</sup> As regards the shape, the meeting was able to "propose" a "fundamental pattern (*ordo*) of the eucharistic service":

GATHERING of the assembly into the grace, love and koinonia of the triune God

#### WORD-SERVICE

Reading of the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments

*Proclaiming* Jesus Christ crucified and risen as the ground of our hope  
(and confessing and singing our faith)  
and so *interceding* for all in need and for unity  
(sharing the peace to seal our prayers and prepare for the table)

#### TABLE-SERVICE

*Giving thanks* over bread and cup  
*Eating and drinking* the holy gifts of Christ's presence  
(collecting for all in need)  
and so

#### BEING SENT (DISMISSAL) in mission in the world<sup>19</sup>

Further help towards the "structure" and "movement" of a eucharistic service is provided in materials from the North American Lutheran With One Voice,<sup>20</sup> *The Book of Common Worship* of the Presbyterian Church USA and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church,<sup>21</sup> and *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church in the USA.<sup>22</sup>

As regards inculturation, the Bossey meeting highlighted music, dress, visual art, and the spatial setting of the liturgy. The book of the meeting presents two of the "regional expressions of the Lima liturgy" that had been prepared from Africa and from Latin America. In these cases, the dominant "cultural" components are the musical settings; the eucharistic prayers turn out to be respectively very close to the original Lima liturgy<sup>23</sup> and to a composition by the North American Lutheran liturgist Gail Ramshaw.<sup>24</sup> Inculturated materials from Europe included in the printed record are "Eine Messe für unsere Zeit",<sup>25</sup> where the wording bears little relation to the original Lima liturgy, and various disjointed items supplied by Per Harling, who had edited *Whipping Ecumenically: Orders of Service from Global Meetings with Suggestions for Local Use*.<sup>26</sup>

As to the content and structure of the "eucharistia", in particular, Gordon Lathrop offers a very succinct introduction to

some of the technical issues,<sup>27</sup> following on Max Thurian's explanations of his intentions and procedures in composing the eucharistic prayer of the original Lima Liturgy.<sup>28</sup> The book of the 1995 Bossey meeting reproduces the text of a thematic prayer focusing on "justice" that was composed on the spot.<sup>29</sup> More useful in the longer run will be the examples of some "ancient and contemporary eucharistic prayers",<sup>30</sup> including two indebted to the so-called "*Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus" and the Alexandrine/Antiochene *Liturgy of St Basil*, both highly influential on liturgical revisions in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as (again) some recent North American examples (Presbyterian and Episcopalian).

An underlying concern of the Bossey meeting was ecclesiological. It was formulated thus by Robert Gribben of the Uniting Church in Australia:

We find ourselves facing the question: what is the significance of this common possession, both at the deepest level of the *ordo*, and of so much else in text, music and symbol? What is the *ecclesial* significance of this possession? ...

Have we, therefore, begun to move into a new ecumenical situation, one which requires us to ask again what "church" is, to search the limits of our received definitions? Through the experience of the ecumenical and liturgical movements, have the churches come to a point where they must ask again whether they may now meet at the one table? Or are there particular moments in their life together, such as meetings for the deliberate purpose of fostering unity in Christ, when sufficient signs of their being the catholic church in one place at one time are present that they may break the bread together?<sup>31</sup>

In point of fact, the WCC itself was about to take another direction on the question of eucharistic celebrations at its own

meetings. In a custom dating from the early years of the modern ecumenical movement, an occasional "open" communion service was included in meetings; it was the Anglicans who most often acted as hosts, since this usually ensured a maximum number of (basically Protestant) communicants (if only because Anglicans themselves were ready to receive at the hands of an Anglican presider, whereas they were not sure to do so in the case of a Methodist or a Presbyterian). In the early days of the World Council of Churches, the practice became established – formalized by the Central Committee in 1963 upon recommendation of the World Conference on Faith and Order at Montreal – of including on the official programme of big ecumenical conferences both a eucharist "according to the liturgy of a church which cannot conscientiously offer an invitation to members of all other churches to partake of the elements" and one in which a local church, or a group of them, can extend to members of other churches "an invitation to participate and partake".<sup>32</sup>

This dual practice witnessed to disagreements among the churches about whether eucharistic communion was a means on the road to unity or rather the goal of the journey; and more will be said about that later. The more "open" of the two practices might seem close to what later came to be called – especially in cases of pastoral need – "eucharistic hospitality". But in the ecumenical case, "occasional communion" was not understood on an individualistic basis, as though participants took part as "private persons". Rather, all who figured in the celebration, in whatever liturgical role, acted and received in some sense as representatives of the churches or ecclesial communities to which they belonged.

During his tenure as WCC general secretary, the Uruguayan Methodist Emilio Castro pressed for greater eucharistic sharing and pleaded at the Canberra Assembly in 1991 that "this should be the last assembly with a divided eucharist". Faith and Order studied the matter again in 1995-1996 but concluded that "it is still not possible to move beyond the guidelines" established in 1963.<sup>33</sup> Under pressure from Orthodox member churches, the WCC then in

fact took steps that – for the time being, at least – fulfilled Castro's plea in an ironic way. Given the current impossibility of a fully common celebration, the 1998 Assembly of the WCC in Harare did not include any eucharistic service as part of official assembly worship. The programme included a service of penitence in recognition of continuing divisions; and various local congregations representing the Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Reformation and Roman Catholic streams of Christianity hosted WCC delegates at their respective celebrations of a Sunday eucharist, in the understanding that existing protocol and canonical disciplines be observed. It should further be noted that Orthodox theologians dislike "specially concocted" liturgies of the eucharist.

### Methodist modes: the continuing reception of BEM, "Eucharist"?

As promised or threatened, I now come to look at my own Methodist tradition – as one variant of Protestantism – for an example of how the convergences registered in the "Eucharist" section of BEM have been "received" (sometimes, perhaps, unwittingly), and what the situation is with regard to the controversial points and open questions remaining from the Lima text. I shall concentrate on the two churches I know best: the United Methodist Church (with its centre of gravity in the USA, UMC) and the Methodist Church of Great Britain (MCGB).

Both churches responded in detail to BEM. The official response from the UMC's council of bishops was among the most thorough and positive of all received (*Churches Respond to BEM*, II:177-199). The British response was itself a piece of discursive theology: while expressing gratitude for BEM, the British had "serious reservations" at many points, perhaps due to "the lack of clarity over methodology" in the Lima text and its insufficient attention to "the cultural context of both theology and ecclesiastical structures" (II:210-229); nevertheless, Methodism had made "great gains in

both experience and understanding of the holy communion in the last two or three decades" and had been "glad to be involved" in the liturgical reform [that had] been the most striking example of convergence between the churches" (222). Both the British and the United Methodist churches have, in fact, produced revised liturgies, including new eucharistic rites.<sup>34</sup> It is characteristic of Methodism to "authorize" rather than "mandate" the use of their liturgical books.

Both the MCGB and the UMC have recently investigated their own understanding and practice of the eucharist. The MCGB Faith and Order Committee's report – *His Presence Makes the Feast: Holy Communion in the Methodist Church*<sup>35</sup> – was in 2003 "received" by the British Conference, which "commended it to districts, circuits and local churches for study and comments" (henceforth usually cited as *His Presence*). Across the Atlantic, the report *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*<sup>36</sup> was "approved" overwhelmingly by the General Conference of the UMC in 2004 (henceforth usually cited as *This Holy Mystery*). Typically, the MCGB notes that "within our church there is a wide diversity of practice and a whole range of ways in which Holy Communion is valued." The United Methodist document speaks even-handedly of "a strong sense of the importance of Holy Communion in the life of individual Christians and of the church" and "at least an equally strong sense of the absence of any meaningful understanding of Eucharistic theology and practice".

Both reports seek to locate current understandings and practices in relation to the Scriptures, the broader and deeper Tradition of Christianity (Orthodox, Catholic, Reformation), and of course the historic Methodist traditions, which are at their strongest – both theologically and practically – in Wesleyan mode. The MCGB report presents itself as a "tool for learning" and "response" (responses to be considered by the Conference in 2005). The UMC report aims at the "better education of pastors in sacramental theology and practice" and a greater discipline in the "accountability" of ministers to bishops, superintendents and



Conferences; it provides guidance in the "principles" and "practices" of celebration; and a study edition has been assembled by Gayle Carlton Felton and published by the UMC's "Discipleship Resources" (2005). Both the MCGB and the UMC reports are sensitive to what has been learned through ecumenical engagement and to questions that remain contentious between the churches on the broader front.

The response of the UMC bishops to BEM showed a welcome appreciation of sacramentality: in the eucharist, "God's effectual word is revealed, proclaimed, heard, seen, and tasted." The British report of 2003 shows Methodist theologians having profited from twentieth-century work in liturgics and sacramentology regarding "performative words", "sign-acts", "dynamic gestures", the "communicative" character of "physical realities" and thus the roles of both word and sacrament in forming the ecclesial body of Christ.<sup>37</sup> Under "The Sunday Service", the *MSB* of 1975 had already declared: "The worship of the Church is the offering of praise and prayer in which God's Word is read and preached, and in its fullness it includes the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion." The *UMBW* of 1992 sets out "the basic pattern of worship" as "Entrance; Proclamation and Response; Thanksgiving and Communion; Sending Forth"; and the "Order of Sunday Worship", in its fullest form, is laid out as "A Service of Word and Table". The current hymnals of both the MCGB and the UMC include (as nos. 621 and 613 respectively) a fine specimen from the Wesley brothers' *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* that has lately gained in ecumenical popularity and joins word and table together after the manner of Luke 24:13-35:

O Thou who this mysterious bread  
Didst in Emmaus break,  
Return, herewith our souls to feed,  
And to thy followers speak.  
Unseal the volume of thy grace,  
Apply the gospel word,  
Open our eyes to see thy face,

Our hearts to know the Lord... (*Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, 29)

In a relatively lengthy exposition of "Nine key themes in the theology of Holy Communion, drawn from the Bible and Christian Tradition", *His Presence* (147-194) includes (though in a different sequence) all those found in the central section of BEM on "The Meaning of the Eucharist", and adds to each heading a phrase from the Scriptures or Methodist liturgical texts:

Thanksgiving (Eucharist): "He gave thanks"  
Life in Unity (Koinonia): "We are one body"  
Remembering (Anamnesis): "Do this in remembrance of me"  
Sacrifice: "For you"  
Presence: "His presence makes the feast"  
The Work of the Spirit (Epiclesis): "Pour out your Spirit"  
Anticipation (Eschatology): "A foretaste of the heavenly banquet"  
Mission and Justice: "To live and work to God's praise and glory"  
Personal Devotion: "Bread to pilgrims given".

An illustrated booklet published in 2006 – *Share This Feast* – testifies to the hope of the British Conference that these themes and this pattern will make their way more deeply and more widely in popular Methodist awareness.

Among the most contentious dogmatic questions left over from the "Eucharist" section in BEM are, as already noted, those of Christ's presence in the eucharist and the sacrificial character of the eucharist. The title itself of the MCGB report of 2003 echoes a line from one of the very best eucharistic hymns by John and Charles Wesley (found as no. 614 in that church's *Hymns and Psalms*, 1983):

Jesus, we thus obey  
Thy last and kindest word;

Here, in thine own appointed way,  
We come to meet thee, Lord...

His presence makes the feast;

And now our spirits feel

The glory not to be expressed,

The joy unspeakable...

He bids us drink and eat

Imperishable food;

He gives his flesh to be our meat,

And bids us drink his blood.

Whate'er the Almighty can

To pardoned sinners give,

The fullness of our God made man

We here with Christ receive. (*Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, 81)

And *The United Methodist Hymnal* of 1989 contains another such (at no. 627):

O the depth of love divine,

The unfathomable grace!

Who shall say how bread and wine

God into us conveys!

How the bread his flesh imparts,

How the wine transmits his blood,

Fills his faithful people's hearts

With all the life of God! (*Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, 57)

Under the heading "Christ truly present", the UMC bishops endorsed the use made in BEM of "two traditional Greek words, *anamnesis* and *epikleisis*":

In terms of the congregation's appropriation of the reality of Christ's presence, the *anamnesis* (memorial, remembrance, representation) means that past, present and future coincide in the sacramental event. All that Jesus Christ means in his person and redemptive work is

brought forth from history to our present experience, which is also a foretaste of the future fulfillment of God's unobstructed reign. And this presence is made to be a reality for us by the working of God's Spirit, whom we "call down" (*epikleisis*) by invocation, both upon the gifts and upon the people. All this we find explicitly taught by John and Charles Wesley, who knew and respected the apostolic, patristic and reformed faith of the Church. (II:188)

As to sacrifice, *His Presence* declares that:

in Holy Communion, Methodists plead the completed and eternal sacrifice of Christ, and we offer ourselves anew in and through the eternal sacrifice, but we do not in any way offer the sacrifice again. At Holy Communion, what Methodists do is to make a memorial of and participate in the offering of Christ". (171)

There is a hint that it may be through bilateral dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church – and the clarification of that Church's teaching on the eucharistic sacrifice – that Methodists have become willing again – after a "dismissive" attitude in nineteenth-century Methodism – to share the doctrine of the Wesleys in this matter:

With solemn faith we offer up,

And spread before Thy glorious eyes

The only ground of all our hope,

That precious bleeding sacrifice,

Which brings Thy grace on sinners down,

And perfects all our souls in one. (*Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, 125)

And then, with reference to the worshippers' self-offering:

Jesus, this mean oblation join  
To Thy great sacrifice.

The Great Thanksgiving of the first Service of Word and Table in the *UMBW* contains the following, directly after the words of institution:

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise in thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith: Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

This comes strikingly close to what the Roman Catholic Church said in its appreciative, albeit gently critical, response to BEM on this point:

The description of the Church's activity in the Eucharist as thanksgiving and intercession needs to be filled out by some reference to the self-offering of the participants of the Eucharist, made in union with the eternal "self-offering" of Christ. E9-11 can be read in such a way that this notion is included. (*Churches Respond*, VI:20)

Given the fondness of Methodist theologians of the eucharist for quoting the Wesleyan hymns, it is perhaps at last the time to say something about the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, a collection of 166 texts published in 1745 under the names of John and Charles Wesley. The hymns are preceded by their main substantive source, namely John Wesley's "extract" from the treatise of the Anglican theologian Daniel Brevint, *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice* (1672); they are arranged under heads that present the Lord's Supper as "a memorial of the sufferings and death of Christ", "a sign and a means of grace", and "a pledge of heaven", and a eucharist that "implies a sacrifice" (that of Christ once "here below", who "stand[s] now before the Throne", while his offering still "smokes through earth and skies"), to which is joined "the sacrifice of our persons".

Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, official hymnals in the Wesleyan stream in Britain regularly contained

some 15 or 20 of these hymns (in various selections). In the Methodist Episcopal tradition(s) in the United States, the numbers selected went down somewhat in the nineteenth century, and drastically in the twentieth. The second half of the twentieth century saw revivals of interest in the hymns at least as texts, as part of a recovery in Wesleyan roots but also under ecumenical interests. The first report from the dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church ("Denver 1971") noted that the Wesleyan hymns found "echoes and recognition" among Catholics: they were seen as

giving a basis and hope for discussion of doctrinal differences about the nature of the real presence and the sense of the sacrificial character of the Eucharist (9).

The extent of their actual use in the "*lex orandi*" remains an open question in *His Presence Makes the Feast* and in *This Holy Mystery*.

With the sacrificial character of the eucharist a closely connected – and in some cases crucial – question is that of presidency. "In the celebration of the eucharist," according to "Eucharist", §29, "Christ gathers, teaches and nourishes the Church. It is Christ who invites to the meal and who presides at it. In most churches, this presidency is signified by an ordained minister." John Wesley had insisted that presidency belongs to ordained elders/presbyters; and the need for such to preside at the Lord's table played a part – in somewhat different ways – in the evolution of Methodists as *distinct denominations* both in America and in Britain. In Episcopal Methodism in America and in Wesleyan Methodism in Britain it remained or became the practice that only ministers should preside. Even in such mainstream bodies of Methodism, however, a practice developed in the twentieth century (partly under the influence of smaller bodies, especially in the event of "Methodist union" in Britain in 1932), whereby specially authorized laypersons might preside for the sake of avoiding "sacramental deprivation" in specific pastoral circumstances. The present "rule" in the MCGB is that "the presiding minister must be

an ordained presbyter or other person specifically authorized by the Conference" (*His Presence*, 110).

The presidency of ministers is a matter of "Church Order (or Structure)", and the "ecumenical dimensions" are at least mentioned (*His Presence*, 132); it has nothing to do, one way or the other, with the sometimes contentious question of "the priesthood of all believers" (*ibid.*). In the case of "extended Communion", laypersons may be authorized by the local church council to "take the bread and wine from a public celebration presided over by a minister to those who are sick or housebound" (130). In the UMC, similar standards apply, although it seems that the authorization of persons other than ordained elders to preside is – at least in the past few years – more readily granted or assumed in cases where elders are supposed not to be available. In their response to BEM, the bishops of the UMC had recognized the ecumenical importance of this matter: "In unique situations [*sic*] we allow unordained pastors to preside at the holy communion, while most churches do not. How can our practice be justified, or can it not?" (*Churches Respond*, II:192).

Since "Christian faith is deepened by the celebration of the Lord's Supper", BEM recommends that "the eucharist should be celebrated frequently" ("Eucharist", §30), and that "every Christian should be encouraged to receive communion frequently" ("Eucharist", §31). As the celebration of the resurrection of Christ, the eucharist is particularly appropriate to Sundays (*ibid.*). John Wesley is recorded as having presided or received at the Lord's supper on an average of some 70 times a year, a remarkably high figure in the eighteenth-century Church of England; the crowds at "Methodist" celebrations were often large. Wesley urged on his followers "The Duty of Constant Communion" (a sermon much cited in *This Holy Mystery* and reproduced in an appendix to the study edition). In September 1784, his reason for venturing to ordain – on his self-understanding as a "presbyter-bishop" – elders for the work in the newly independent United States of America is

captured at least in part by the sentence: "I advise the elders to administer the Supper of the Lord on every Lord's Day."

Sacramental practice declined in later Methodism on both sides of the Atlantic, but from the second half of the twentieth century there is indubitable evidence of an increased frequency of celebration in many local churches, often from quarterly to monthly and more, although rarely to weekly (for Britain, see *His Presence Make the Feast*, 32-36; 91-93). The UMC council of bishops undertook to "urge our congregations to a more frequent, regular observance of the sacrament" (*Churches Respond*, II:189). The MCGB, however, found "Eucharist", §§30-31 to be "stated too strongly", on noting that many Methodists had "learnt to nourish themselves" on "preaching services without communion" and "would not now wish to see the balance altered", for indeed "the infrequency of celebration actually heightens the sense of the eucharist's importance" (*Churches Respond*, II:224); and those positions are still recorded, at least in muted form, in *His Presence* (32-36; 119).

While BEM presupposes bread and wine as the matter of the eucharist, a question is raised in the commentary to "Eucharist", §28:

Since New Testament days, the Church has attached the greatest importance to the continued use of the elements of bread and wine which Jesus used at the Last Supper. In certain parts of the world, where bread and wine are not customary or obtainable, it is now sometimes held that local food and drink serve better to anchor the eucharist in everyday life. Further study is required concerning the question of which features of the Lord's Supper were unchangeably instituted by Jesus, and which features remain within the Church's competence to decide.

Since the late nineteenth century, as part of the "temperance movement", Methodists have regularly used grape juice, understood in some sense as "wine". This remains the "canonical" provision in

both the MCGB and the UMC, and many Methodists remain adamantly opposed to the use of alcohol. *His Presence* includes this among the "ecumenically sensitive issues" (116; cf. the UMC council of bishops in *Churches Respond*, II:192). Another – leaving aside "extended communion" – is the "reverent disposal" of any remaining elements from the Lord's table (cf. BEM, "Eucharist", §32). *His Presence* reports and comments thus:

Some traditions insist the only reverent way is consumption at the end of the service; others feel throwing the elements away, even "sharing them with the birds as another part of God's creation" is acceptable. Many, in other traditions, are horrified by this practice and Methodists will want to think very carefully about the need not to scandalize others unnecessarily. Consumption at the end of the service is the most widely recognized form of reverent disposal across the Christian Churches. It does not of itself commit one to any particular view of the status of the remaining elements. (117)

A similar range of practices is noted in the 1992 *UMBW*, all of them allowed ("may", p. 30).

On the question of admission to the Lord's table, BEM says little: "As it is the new sacramental meal of the people of God, *every Christian* should be encouraged to receive communion frequently" ("Eucharist", §31, emphasis added). The commentary to "Eucharist", §19 reports that "there is discussion in many churches today about the inclusion of baptized children as communicants at the Lord's Supper." Since this is standard practice in the Orthodox Churches, it must be Protestant (and perhaps the Roman Catholic) churches that are in view. In many parts of Methodism, children now often participate at an earlier age (before "confirmation", however understood) than was formerly the case.

More controversial is the understanding and practice – at least in parts of Methodism – that unbaptized persons may receive. This

notion of an "open table" dates largely from the early twentieth century and rests upon a highly contestable interpretation of a phrase that John Wesley did in fact on very rare occasions use – the Lord's supper as a "converting ordinance"; but Wesley in fact had a much more subtle conception of "degrees of faith". For instance: "A man who is not assured that his sins are forgiven may yet have a kind or degree of faith, which distinguishes him not only from a devil but also from an heathen, and on which I may admit him to the Lord's Supper." Thus a baptized person – such could largely be assumed in the historical context – who was seeking "full assurance" in the subjective sense could be encouraged to come expectantly to the Lord's table.<sup>38</sup> The United Methodist bishops correctly noted that "in early British and American Methodism the altar was often 'fenced' for reasons both moralistic and doctrinal" (*Churches Respond*, II:183). The *UMBW* of 1992 is thus historically inaccurate when it says:

We have no tradition of refusing any who present themselves desiring to receive. (p.29)

The British *MWB* of 1999 comes closer to a Wesleyan and ecumenically sensitive position:

It is ... the duty and privilege of members of the Methodist Church to share in this sacrament [of holy communion]. The Methodist Conference has encouraged local churches to admit baptized children to communion. Those who are communicants and belong to other Churches whose discipline so permits are also welcome as communicants in the Methodist Church.<sup>39</sup>

According to the UMC's *This Holy Mystery*, "Nonbaptized people who respond in faith to the invitation in our liturgy will be welcomed to the Table. They should receive teaching about Holy Baptism as the sacrament of entrance into the community of faith ... and be counselled and nurtured towards baptism as soon as possible."



Whatever the case in some parts of 20th and 21st century Methodism, it may be noted that, in very recent times in some other Protestant churches, communion of the unbaptized may at least be contemplated (the 2006 General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the USA commissioned a study of the question, for instance) and even practised.

### Unity and communion: the ecclesiology of BEM, "Eucharist"

The very purpose of the "convergences" in faith and order registered in BEM is, of course, to "bring closer the day when Christ's divided people will be visibly reunited around the Lord's Table" ("Eucharist", §33). A crucial question is that of the nature and concrete identity of the communities that are currently "divided" and will, it is hoped, one day be "united" around the table of the Lord. Equally important is the related – intermediate – question of the passage from "division" to "unity": when and how does "convergence" lead to, and arrive at, the "consensus" that marks what the preface to BEM described as "that experience of life and articulation of faith necessary to realize and maintain the Church's visible unity": "Full consensus can only be proclaimed after the churches reach the point of living and acting together in unity." No wonder, then, that many of the official responses to BEM called for Faith and Order to undertake a study of ecclesiology.<sup>40</sup>

From the early days of modern ecumenism the Orthodox churches have rejected the notion of "inter-communion", saying there is either "communion" in the one Church or no communion at all. That position is understandable if "inter-communion" is taken as the "*End-Station*" – what was in 2001 described (approvingly!) by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD, comprising distinct and autonomous Lutheran, Reformed and Union churches or *Einzelkirchen*) as "*ein geordnetes Miteinander konfessionsverschiedener Kirchen*", seemingly a virtually static pluralism that might perhaps

better be characterized as "peaceful co-existence in conditions of cold war". But there has also been a positive stream in modern ecumenism that has viewed "inter-communion" as at least a stage on the way to the attainment of full unity among churches that are committed by prayer and work to that road and goal. At the Faith and Order conference in Lund in 1952, Church of Scotland theologian T. F. Torrance spoke of the eucharist as "the divinely given sacrament of unity, *the medicine for our divisions*".<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, as most would admit, there is need for continuing work on matters in the areas of both faith and order (including the instances of "decision-making" or, we may dare to say, the "structures of authority") regarding the conditions that are necessary to the recognition of ecclesial character. The nub of an ecclesiology may even be found in BEM, "Eucharist", §19. As already quoted:

The sharing in one bread and the common cup in a given place demonstrates and effects the oneness of the sharers with Christ and with their fellow sharers in all times and places. It is in the eucharist that the community of God's people is fully manifested. Eucharistic celebrations always have to do with the whole Church, and the whole Church is involved in each local eucharistic celebration. In so far as a church claims to be a manifestation of the whole Church, it will take care to order its own life in ways that take seriously the interests and concerns of other churches.

The question then becomes: what is necessary and sufficient – in faith, order, governance, and liturgical performance – for existing "denominations" to be able to recognize that it is one and the same eucharist that is being celebrated in their own communities and in the communities of others so that all may be called "Church" – and in such a way that there is then no need or justification for their continuing *separate* existence but rather all may proceed (in what



may admittedly be a longer institutional process) to "full visible unity"?

Some hint towards that recognition and process may perhaps be found in the first published version from the ecclesiological study of Faith and Order.<sup>42</sup> That text in §§78-80 happily reaffirms in outline the central section of "Eucharist" on "The Meaning of the Eucharist", even while noting in a "problem box"<sup>43</sup> the persistence of tensions as to whether the eucharist "is primarily a meal where Christians receive the body and blood of Christ" (and churches "continue to disagree on the nature and mode of the presence of Christ"), "or primarily a service of thanksgiving" (although among those who favour this view, "there is growing convergence concerning its sacrificial character"). For our purposes, the greatest progress is registered in the text's amplification of the nature of ecclesial communion by bringing into the picture of BEM's "Eucharist", §19 the other properly constitutive elements of the eucharistic community and communion:

66. The communion of the Church is expressed in the communion between local churches in each of which the fullness of the Church resides. The communion of the Church embraces local churches in each place and all places at all times. Local churches are held in the communion of the Church by the one gospel, the one baptism and the one Holy Communion, served by a common ministry. This communion is expressed in service and witness to the world.

67. The communion of local churches is sustained by a fundamental coherence and consonance in the living elements of apostolicity and catholicity: the Scriptures, baptism, eucharist and the service of a common ministry. As "bonds of communion" these gifts serve the authentic continuity of the life of the whole Church and help to sustain the local churches in a communion of truth and love. They are given to maintain the Church

in integrity as the one Church of Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. The goal of the search for full communion is realized when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church in all its fullness. This full communion will be expressed on the local and universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action. In such a communion of unity and authentic diversities, churches are bound in all aspects of their life together at all levels in confessing the one faith, and in engaging in worship and witness, deliberation and action.

Later on, the 1998 text reaffirms from BEM the three dimensions of ministry, and especially oversight, as personal, collegial and communal (here called conciliar or synodal). The most interesting development for our purposes comes in the connection suggested between eucharistic presidency, on the one hand, and primacy and conciliarity on the other:

There is still much work to be done to arrive at something like a consensus between those who do not believe that conciliarity or primacy at a world level are necessary and those who believe that full communion cannot exist without this link among all the local eucharistic communities...

Most churches accept that a eucharist needs a president. Amongst these, there are some who would go on to say that it follows that a gathering of eucharistic communities at regional and world level similarly needs a president, in the service of communion. In this perspective conciliarity implies primacy and primacy conciliarity.

In its revised form as *The Nature and Mission of the Church*,<sup>44</sup> the ecclesiological text maintains paragraphs 66 and 67 almost verbatim (as 65 and 66). Sadly, however, the possible link with eucharistic presidency (admittedly made only in a "box" in the text

of 1998) is dropped from the discussion of conciliarity and primacy in the text of 2005.

According to Pope Innocent III (bishop of Rome, 1198-1216), the eucharist both "signifies and effects ecclesial unity (*significat et efficit unitatem ecclesiasticam*)".<sup>45</sup> In the ecumenical process, it remains a fair question whether points – perhaps different in the differing relationships among existing bodies – may be discerned at which sufficient unity has been reached for the eucharist to "signify" it, while the eucharist's "effective" power may be trusted to forward the institutional achievement of unity in all its fullness. That may be the dynamic of BEM.

## NOTES

1. Neuchâtel, Delachaux & Niestlé, 1966.
2. Neuchâtel, Delachaux & Niestlé, 1959.
3. London, Epworth Press, 1971. Updated editions: New York, Oxford University Press, 1981; Akron, OH, Order of St. Luke Publications, 2002; Peterborough, Epworth Press, 2003.
4. For his own retrospective account, see Lukas Vischer, "The Convergence Texts on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: How Did They Take Shape? What Have They Achieved?" in *The Ecumenical Review*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, vol. 54, 2002, pp. 431-454.
5. *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vols. I-VI, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Papers No. 129, 132, 135, 137, 143, 144 respectively, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1986-1988; to be cited hereafter as *Churches Respond* and by volume number (I-VI) and page number.
6. Faith and Order Paper No. 149, Geneva, WCC, 1990. For a very detailed survey and analysis of responses concerning the Eucharist, see Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Eucharist in the Churches' Responses to the Lima Text" in *One in Christ* 25 (1989) pp. 53-74; and cf. idem, "Word and Sacrament in the Churches' Responses to the Lima Text" in *One in Christ* 24 (1988) pp. 304-327.
7. See Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Ecumenical Rediscovery of the Trinity" in *One in Christ* 34 (1998) pp. 95-124.
8. See *Petit Traité de la Sainte Cène* in *Corpus Reformationum*, vol. 33: *Calvini Opera*, vol. 5, cols. 433-460, in particular 458-460. From the Swiss Reformed – if not exactly Calvinist – side, see already J.-J. von Allmen, "Worship and the Holy Spirit" in *Studia*

*Liturgia* 2 (1963) 124-135; idem, *Essai sur le repas du Seigneur*, pp. 23-36; and Lukas Vischer, "Epiklese, Zeichen der Einheit, der Erneuerung und des Aufbruchs" in his *Ökumenische Skizzen*, Frankfurt am Main, Otto Lembeck, 1972, pp. 46-57.

9. *Churches Respond*, *op. cit.*, IV:32. Rather negative attitudes towards pneumatology or an explicit *epikleisis* are found in Lutheran responses from the Netherlands (V:21), Austria (IV:18), Estonia (IV:43), Hanover (IV:52); and hesitation is shown by the Churches of Norway (II:115), Sweden (II:131), and Finland (III:122).

10. An earlier draft had said, even more sharply, that such divisions "make a mockery" of the eucharist.

11. For a much fuller account, see *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. by Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen Westerfield Tucker, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 721-754; cf. pp. 534-540, and 696-720.

12. See, for instance, from the Lutheran World Federation, *Worship Net*, issue no. 5, February 1995.

13. For the text of the original "Lima Liturgy", see *Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*, ed. by Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright, Geneva, WCC, 1983, pp. 241-255; and for the Vancouver version, *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. by Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen Westerfield Tucker, pp. 747-751.

14. Remarkably, the various German Protestant churches (VELKD; EKD) included in their draft service-book of 1990 (*Erneuerte Agenda: Vorentwurf*) the eucharistic prayer of the original Lima Liturgy: "Die 'Lima-Liturgie' wurde als wichtiger ökumenischer Impuls aus jüngster Zeit aufgenommen" (p. 601). A few changes of nuance were made regarding *epikleisis* and sacrifice, and allowance was made for the omission of paragraphs that were more suited to the original occasion in January 1982 than to repeated subsequent use (item 487, pp. 625-627). The final version of the service book – *Evangelisches Gottesdienstbuch* (1999) – retained the prayer, though now with more changes (pp. 656-658).

15. A report and associated materials were published in *Eucharistic Worship in Ecumenical Context: The Lima Liturgy – And Beyond*, ed. by Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller, Geneva, WCC, 1998, here p. 2.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

18. So formulated by Gordon Lathrop, a participant; *ibid.*, p. 24.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 35, preceded by a rationale on pp. 29-34. An alternative placement is allowed for the creed "in preparation for the service of the table" (the Byzantine position), and for the collection ("associated with the intercessions"). The possibility of placing the exchange of peace immediately before communion (a Roman peculiarity that had been followed in the original Lima liturgy) is here quietly ignored.

20. Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1995; here pp. 140-144.
21. Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 1993; here pp. 144-145.
22. Episcopal Church in the USA, Seabury Press, 1979; here pp. 145-146.
23. So with Latin America, pp. 77-80.
24. So with Africa, pp. 65-68; cf. pp. 155-157.
25. Composed by Kurt Rose and Wolfgang Teichmann; here pp. 98-123.
26. Geneva, WCC, 1995; here pp. 124-125, 128-133.
27. *Eucharistic Worship in Ecumenical Contexts: The Lima Liturgy – And Beyond*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-20.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-158.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
32. *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order: Montreal 1963: the Report*, ed. by P.C. Rodger and L. Vischer, Faith and Order Paper No. 42, London, SCM/Press, 1964, p. 79.
33. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Faith and Order Board: Bangalore, January 1996*, Faith and Order Paper No. 172, Geneva, WCC, 1996, pp. 54, 133-138.
34. In Britain, *The Methodist Service Book* (already in 1975; henceforth *MSB*), and then *The Methodist Worship Book* (1999; henceforth *MWB*); *The United Methodist Book of Worship* appeared in 1992 (henceforth *UMBW*).
35. Werrington, Methodist Publishing House, 2003.
36. Nashville, TN, General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church, 2004.
37. *His Presence*, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-146; cf. 9; pp. 123-124.
38. For a fuller discussion, with references, see Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Sacraments in Wesleyan Perspective", in his *Worship with One Accord*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 105-125, here pp. 114-116.
39. *MWB*, p. 114; for the history and practice in Britain, see *His Presence*, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-82; pp. 133-135.
40. See *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* 1982-1990, pp. 131-151, especially 147-151.
41. T.F. Torrance, "Eschatology and the Eucharist", in *Intercommunion*, ed. by Donald Baillie and John Marsh, London, SCM Press, 1952, p. 304.
42. *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 181, Geneva, WCC/Faith and Order, 1998.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
44. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2005.
45. *De sacro altaris mysterio* IV, 36 (PL 217: 879).

## BEM and the Struggle for the Liturgical Soul of the Emergent Church

Rev. Prof. Michael Northcott

There seem to be no evangelical churches left in this city which adhere to the traditional shape of the liturgy in their style of worship." So commented a new member of my local Episcopal church of St James, Leith, Scotland. He and his wife had left their former church because instead of formal readings of Scripture, and a recognizable liturgy including confession, creeds and eucharist, its worship was increasingly characterized by long sessions of popular Christian music interspersed with inspirational talks from the pastor which were only faintly related to Scripture.

My friend's observations reminded me of a visit I made in 2002 to a church in San Clemente in Orange County, California, with a former graduate student who attended there. The church met in an informal hall and congregants were greeted as they entered the church with the offer of Starbucks coffee and doughnuts. Everyone was dressed casually and most sported the kind of gear worn by surfers, San Clemente being a community located along a deeply sloping Pacific shoreline. The service opened with a number of popular Christian songs, their words digitally projected onto a large screen at the front and a band of competent musicians led the singing with the aid of electric guitar, drum set and keyboard. After around 15 minutes of this initial "praise and worship" session the

band music subsided and a time of prayer was led by the church pastor.

The worship then proceeded after more singing to the pastor's address. Dressed in jeans and a Hawaiian shirt the pastor used the digital projector to flash up a number of scriptural verses which were projected onto the backdrop of a surfer surfing a big wave in the deep ocean with the sun just above the horizon in the background. The central trope of the sermon was the pastor's account of a boat trip which he had made with friends to a large sub-surface reef some 80 or so miles off the coast of California which was the site of stupendously large and long waves. The group had sailed out on a clear day and found the kind of long tall and sustained waves surfers dream of and they had hours of surfing enjoyment and the trip was a great success.

The Christian life, we were told, was analogous to the surfer riding the waves. Some days the waves are tall and fierce, whipped up by the wind or by particular tidal patterns and calling for courage and endurance; other days the waves are lower, and the surfer has to wait for a good ride, and this teaches patience. The scriptural texts to which this surfing analogy related were variously from the prophets, the gospels and the epistles of Paul. They were not read in context but simply projected as individual verses onto the screen and a word or phrase highlighted – for example Jesus stilling the storm on Lake Galilee. The service ended not with the eucharist but with more popular song singing, and fellowship over more Starbucks coffee and doughnuts.

### BEM and eucharistic worship

The Lima document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) was in many ways the high point of the ecumenical wave which succeeded the tragic splits in Christendom which had been so powerfully exposed in the Second World War and which left much of the land and peoples of Europe ravaged in 1945.<sup>1</sup> The publication

of an agreed statement on patterns of ministry and worship, which in particular commended the celebration of the eucharist as the normal worship service of Christians (an issue and a practice on which Christendom had been divided for four hundred years) was a truly dramatic event. This was after all no ordinary ecumenical report. As Orthodox theologian Nikos Nissiotis put it, BEM was the outcome of a Faith and Order process which involved "the most comprehensive theological and ecclesiastical forum in Christendom", including as it did representatives from all major Protestant denominations from Baptist to Episcopalian, as well as from Roman Catholics and Orthodox churches.<sup>2</sup>

Rehearsing the evidence for the norm of eucharistic frequency in the New Testament and the early church, BEM declares unequivocally that "as the eucharist celebrates the resurrection of Christ, it is appropriate that it should take place at least every Sunday". That this statement is received and embraced by the Protestant as well as Catholic and Orthodox representatives of Faith and Order is remarkable, given the vastly divergent worship practices which have become established and even normative in Protestant circles since the Reformation. Despite the clear New Testament and early Christian norm of weekly eucharistic worship, and its practice as the archetypal form of Christian worship on the Lord's Day in all branches of Christendom until the Reformation, since the Reformation regular weekly eucharistic worship had declined among Protestants to the point that many churches held at most quarterly celebrations and even these were often added on as a kind of liturgical "supplement" to the service of the Word which had become the Protestant norm. By joining in the BEM process the majority of Protestant denominations across the world agreed that the loss of the eucharist as the normal liturgical form had impoverished Christian worship. In most of the more than 186 formal responses to BEM from Protestant denominations, their representatives committed their clergy and laity to the recovery and renewal of a more traditional relationship between Word and Sacrament.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the formal responses on this issue are worth rehearsing as a reminder of just how significant BEM was in challenging and even changing churches with vastly divergent eucharistic practices towards a commitment to more regular celebration. The United Methodist Church (based in the USA) commented as follows:

As we United Methodists regard the church's practice through the ages, we can recognize how our own usage has fallen short of the fullness of the holy communion. Now, without minimizing at all the preaching of God's word, we more clearly recognize the equivalent place of the sacrament. As BEM rightly shows, the eucharist is "the central act of the Church's worship" because it effectively unites word and sacrament. God's effectual word is there revealed, proclaimed, heard, seen and tasted.<sup>4</sup>

The United Church of Christ (USA) observed that:

a weekly celebration of holy communion is not our predominant custom. Our study of "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" discloses that the frequency is increasing... We are challenged by the document to rethink the question of the frequency of the eucharistic celebration.<sup>5</sup>

The Brethren commented:

The text's articulation of this rich understanding of eucharist as the sacrament of Christ's real presence has enhanced Brethren belief and practice, encouraging congregations to celebrate with bread and cup more often than at the semi-annual Love Feast.<sup>6</sup>

These responses to BEM are representative of a far larger number. What is remarkable is the sense of agreement that BEM seems to have produced on the issues of eucharistic frequency, and the note of contrition, as well as the declared intention to change,

recorded in many of the official church responses to Lima. Of course this warm welcome for the Lima statements on eucharistic frequency did not happen in a vacuum. The liturgical movement was already having a major impact on churches in the West and in the South and the recovery in this movement of traditional liturgical texts and practices, and consequently the renewal of sacramental worship, anticipated in many ways the ecumenical accord of BEM on these matters.<sup>7</sup> We might say then that BEM occurred at a unique *kairos* moment in the modern Church which was in some significant ways already prepared for the challenge of recovery and renewal which BEM represented.

### **Eucharistic frequency after Lima**

Twenty-five years on from Lima it is worth asking whether the heady sense of liturgical convergence that BEM crystallized has actually been realized. Some churches have made real progress in moving towards a more regular pattern of eucharistic worship. In Lutheran and Anglican churches in many countries there has been an increasing embrace of eucharistic worship as the norm for Sunday worship.<sup>8</sup> However there are still wide variations of practice within these Episcopal churches, with significant resistance to change in parts of Northern Europe. There is also a vocal minority of local churches in all nations and regions, more often of an evangelical orientation, which continue to maintain that eucharistic frequency, or a formal liturgy of the eucharist which sets the words of institution in a thanksgiving prayer, are still matters of controversy.<sup>9</sup>

Many other Protestant churches at national level have embraced the emphasis of BEM on the normative character of eucharistic worship in newly published books of liturgies, and books of church discipline or order. However the aspirations of the liturgically adept editors of such texts are not always realized in practice. Thus the Church of Scotland's new Book of Common Order clearly envisages



a service of Word and Sacrament as the norm on Sunday. In practice there is only a very small number of Church of Scotland churches where the eucharist is celebrated every Sunday. Thus although there have been moves in a more eucharistic direction among such signatory churches as American United Methodists, Scottish Presbyterians and German Lutherans, regular Sunday celebration of the eucharist is by no means on the way to becoming the norm in these churches. And so despite the commitment to the Lima process of the member churches of the World Council of Churches, few have actually achieved in the last quarter century the recovery of eucharistic worship as the determinative liturgical pattern of Sunday, and even daily, worship as BEM envisages.

The reasons for this failure to realize the eucharistic ideal set forth in BEM are many and various. Principal among them is the continuing suspicion of ritualism in Protestant circles. Despite the teaching of Calvin, Luther and the Wesleys on the importance of retaining a regular eucharist, church and civil authorities across post-reformation Europe dramatically reduced the frequency of eucharistic celebration, at the same time as persecuting those who sought to maintain their allegiance to the Catholic faith and continue to receive the Mass. Resistance to regular communion was and remains linked with Protestant resistance to Catholic ideas of priesthood, and in particular with the doctrinal account of the eucharist as a constant re-presentation by the priest on behalf of the People of God of the one perfect sacrifice which Christ made of his own body on the cross.

### Ecumenical eucharists

It is then highly significant that a crucial element in the new climate of ecumenical relations which led to the process which produced the BEM documents was the recognition at Vatican II of the brokenness of Christendom resulting from the Reformation. At the same time there was in the 1960s and 1970s a genuine and often

expressed desire in Catholic and Protestant circles to recover visible unity. The battlefields of two European, and ultimately world, wars had powerfully contributed to this desire, leading Christians in Europe in particular to see the Church as having a responsibility to help secure the peace of the world through reconciliation and unity among divided churches.

Eberhard Jüngel observes that one of the places where eucharistic practice actually fostered visible unity was on the battlefields of Europe. In time of war "Catholic priests on the battlefield gave the sacrament to dying Protestant soldiers, and Protestant ministers gave the sacrament to Catholic soldiers in danger of death".<sup>10</sup> After the battles ended a new practice sprang up where Protestants and Catholics would celebrate the Lord's Supper together, not as means of converting one another but as celebration of elements of a shared identity even in the midst of their broken communion. And Christians not only shared in such celebrations. Their theologians also increasingly embraced a shared doctrinal account of the eucharist as the Church – as the constituting action of the whole people of God. In these accounts, which were stimulated in part through ecumenical dialogue between Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant, earlier controversies about priestly sacrifice were superseded.

My own experiences of Christian gatherings where ecumenical eucharistic fellowship was enjoyed in this era were not in formal ecumenical meetings or conferences, but in gatherings of charismatic Christians in the north-east of England where I was a student. In the heady days of the neo-Pentecostal explosion of the 1970s it did not seem to matter from which denomination a person hailed. The important thing was the shared experience of "Spirit Baptism", the expression of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the shared sense of union with God and one another that the public exercise of these gifts in worship represented. On a number of occasions in those years I took part in eucharistic worship at which Protestants and Catholics were active participants. Some of these celebrations were in the Anglo-Catholic church I attended in



Durham city, a church whose charismatic style attracted charismatic Christians right across the denominational spectrum from Brethren to Roman Catholic. Others were in Anglican or Catholic colleges and retreat centres.

In 2006 the ecumenical scene in Britain and beyond looks very different than it did in the years leading up to the production of *BEM*. Roman Catholic parishes in Britain and elsewhere follow a much stricter eucharistic discipline than they did in the post-Vatican II era. The tradition whereby reception of the eucharist defines the boundary of Christian identity and communion was strongly reaffirmed by Pope John Paul II and then Cardinal Ratzinger, and it is rare indeed now for a non-Catholic to find a welcome at a Catholic altar, or for Catholics to feel confident in receiving the eucharist in a non-Catholic setting. Thus the kinds of joint celebrations of the eucharist between Catholic and Protestant that were more common in the period before *BEM* are now rarely to be experienced. At the same time the neo-Pentecostal explosion, which had its own kinds of ecumenical and liturgical impacts, has increasingly moved outside of the main denominations, both Catholic and non-Catholic, and begun to foster the birth of new forms of church.

### "Post-ecumenical" emergent churches

In the new styles of "megachurch" or "seeker church" which are now widely established in the United States, and which may also be encountered in cities in Europe and in many cities in the Southern hemisphere, worship takes a "non-liturgical" form of the kind which I describe above in the "surfer church" in San Clemente at the outset of this article.<sup>11</sup> That such worship is hardly recognizable as the worship of Christendom is troubling in itself. Of equal concern is that this kind of worship represents the cultural capitulation of Christian faith and worship to global consumer culture.

Far from challenging modern norms of consumerism, hedonism and individualism the post-liturgical forms Christianity is taking in these new churches is indicative of a deep subversion of the Christian faith. The surfer church in San Clemente is a case in point. Starbucks coffee and doughnuts represent a kind of secularized ritual feast which is a long way both in form and cultural location from the breaking, blessing and sharing of the bread and wine of the eucharist. Instead of affirming bread and wine as those elements in which the redemption of Christ is celebrated and the presence of the divine Spirit is renewed as a means to the union of the People of God, large food and drink corporations deliver coffee and doughnuts to the church. The People of God are united not by the breaking of one loaf and the sharing of one cup but by an act of pagan feasting which they could just as well have enjoyed at their local mall as at the back of church.

Sociologists and theologians in the United States suggest that this new style of church represents a distinctively American form of secularization in which the devotion of modern culture to the idols of economic growth and the commodity form does not produce a decline in religious observance so much as a shift in the culture of Christianity whereby the church undergoes internal secularization.<sup>12</sup> In the process the traditional practices and teachings of the Church undergo a dramatic transformation. As Michael Budde suggests, Christian worship in this new style of church is effectively commodified and the challenge of the Kingdom of God to the ecological destructiveness, injustices, and spiritual vacuity of the modern consumer economy is entirely lost.<sup>13</sup>

The neglect of communion in the new emerging churches in the West is also replicated in the rapid growth of independent and Pentecostal churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America. As Gerhard Oosthuizen observed in 1968 with reference to new independent churches in South Africa, "most of the nativistic movements do not observe the essential sacrament of Holy Communion".<sup>14</sup> And the situation is unchanged in more recent decades. In the 1980s I visited a number of neo-Pentecostal and post-denominational

churches in Malaysia as part of sociological field investigations into the phenomena of charismatic Christianity during my five year sojourn as lecturer in the Seminari Theologi Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. Churches with names such as Calvary Church or the Full Gospel Assembly, the latter having branches in all the main cities of East and West Malaysia, celebrate the eucharist even more rarely than their mainline Protestant predecessors (most of which in Malaysia still only infrequently celebrate the eucharist). A survey of independent churches in Soweto, South Africa, found that one quarter never celebrated communion and the remainder celebrated communion four times a year and at the major festivals of Christmas and Easter.

Oosthuizen speculates that the reason for the absence or infrequency of the eucharist in the independent churches is their association of the ritual with magical, healing and exorcism practices in African traditional religions. I found a similar obstacle in West Malaysia, particularly among the Chinese churches. The eucharist to many Chinese Christians seems to recall elements of ancestral altars and temple worship which they have turned away from in converting to Christianity and therefore they prefer forms of Christian worship which are confined to praise and the ministry of the Word, this latter being accorded a very high significance in Chinese churches. This bifurcation between ritual and philosophy of course represents a deeper and historic division in Chinese culture between Taoism and Confucianism and while the systemic superstitions and priestcraft of Taoism are typically firmly rejected by Chinese Christians, many remain more sympathetic to the pragmatic wisdom and moral teachings of Confucianism.<sup>15</sup>

### Charismatic Christianity as postcolonial church

Two of the major reasons for the rise of charismatic Christianity in former missionary contexts are worthy of mention in relation to the problem of neglect of the eucharist. The first is the association of

the mission churches with colonial economic and political regimes. Thus in Latin America the eucharist is experienced by indigenous peoples as a prominent part of the Spanish or Portuguese speaking cult of a colonial religion which favoured colonials and those families with whom they intermarried over indigenous Indians, and which rejected indigenous in favour of foreign languages. The association – rightly or wrongly – of the Roman Catholic Church with colonial and post-colonial injustices and exploitation is an important element in the growing disaffection of indigenous rural and urban communities from the colonial faith and the extraordinary growth of Pentecostal and evangelical Protestant groups in Central and Latin America.<sup>16</sup> This is related to a rejection of what they see as privatized forms of eucharistic piety, which they associate with the colonial era.

The second major reason for the turn to charismatic and neo-pentecostal Christianity in the South is the connection between this form of Christianity and the world of spirits, which is the nomenclature of Christianity and the world of spirits, which is the nomenclature of the spirit world, or at least the possibility of its continued interaction with the lives of Christians. Many Christian converts in the South therefore frequently combine adherence to the new colonial faith with a continued consciousness of the spirit world, and a preparedness on occasion to seek the aid of traditional practices and traditional spirit mediums in resolving certain crises in their lives, such as those of ill health, bereavement or other kinds of loss.

In Malaysia it was common to find adherents of both Christianity and Islam resorting to traditional shamans – known locally as “bomos” – for help in such crises. What charismatic Christianity offers Christians who have embraced the dual worlds of rationalist Western Christianity and the traditional spirit world, is a means for bridging the cultural gap. This is because charismatic Christianity affirms the existence of the spirit world and claims to give charismatic Christians power over this world through the gifts

or charisms of the Holy Spirit, and through ministries of deliverance and healing.<sup>17</sup> The exercise of these charisms in public worship constitutes a new form of embodied worship which effectively replaces sacramental worship in many neo-Pentecostal churches.

The liturgical form which then predominates in both megachurches and neo-Pentecostal churches is that represented by modern electronically enhanced "praise" music. The music is often repetitive both in tune and words and its primary note is celebration and rejoicing. But although the richer doctrinal content and the profound musical settings of earlier eras is absent from these hymns, it must be admitted that the note of rejoicing is in itself entirely traditional. The first mention of the Lord's Supper in the Book of Acts indicates that those who partook day by day of the Lord's Supper did so "with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46). As Jungel notes, the early tradition of the Lord's Supper indicates "that Eucharistic gladness is essential to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is not just a liturgical extra, it flows from the Eucharistic mystery itself."<sup>18</sup> The theological occasion for this rejoicing is the grace of God which makes real again in the sacrament the saving effects of the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

The eucharist is the most powerful form which the Word takes among the people of God. In this form the liberation promised by the gospel becomes tangibly real.<sup>19</sup> The problem however with the emergent forms of Church is that this original unity between rejoicing and gospel is lost; rejoicing and eucharist, worship and liturgy are bifurcated. A crucial element in this bifurcation is the loss of a theology of the cross in many of the megachurches and in neo-Pentecostalism. The eucharist is centrally focused on the bringing of the saving effects of the passion and death, as well as the resurrection, of Christ crucified. It intimates that it was not by triumphal assertion of the superior strength of divine power over the fallen powers, which dominate and distort the structures of life on earth, that God in Christ redeemed the world, but rather through the kenotic weakness of the Son of Man, who gave up his life as a ransom for many. The kenotic shape of Christ's passion and

crucifixion, and hence of the eucharistic liturgy, does not sit well with the triumphalist theologies of prosperity and Pentecostal power regnant in the megachurches and neo-Pentecostal churches.<sup>20</sup>

### Global cultures and the post-ecumenical era

In his reflection on the process of BEM after the production and reception of the Lima documents, Lukas Vischer suggests that the movement of the churches towards visible unity – a movement of which these documents were such a crucial promissory sign – was lost for several reasons. One reason was because errors were made in the ecumenical process itself; there was, in particular, a failure to make effective links and transitions from grand ecumenical conferences, commitments and confessions to local congregations in the member churches of the WCC. The second is that there was a retrenchment and re-confessionalization in many churches, not least the ancient churches.<sup>21</sup>

While both these points are entirely cogent and pertinent, a third element must also be considered and this is the dramatic shifts in global cultures since the 1970s. Some talk of this shift in terms of a philosophical shift towards "post-modernity". Others note its more popular manifestation in a move from tradition and shared memory to individual expression, and from a text-based culture to an increasingly multi-sensory and, especially, visual, culture. These cultural shifts have been to a large extent embraced by the megachurches which often present a cinema-like experience to worshippers (and indeed in some cities, such as Kuala Lumpur, former cinemas are often used as the worship spaces for these new style churches). While these auditoria often have few images in them they nonetheless offer with their screens and electronic public address systems a surrounding auditory and visual experience which owes as much to the cinema as it does to the Christian sanctuary.

The multi-sensory nature of some of the new styles of church is not just a departure from the more text-based worship of previous

eras. It also recovers some of the multisensory character of worship in Christian history, and in particular before the invention of the printing press. As Walter Ong recounts, the move from orality to literacy represented a powerful cultural shift in premodern Europe.<sup>22</sup> Postmodern Europe, and global culture, is now undergoing an analogous cultural shift with the creation of virtual reality in the form of the world wide web in which virtual space and growing numbers of citizens spend parts of their working and leisure lives.

At the same time the enormous growth in visual media in the last forty years is having significant cultural impacts, such that present generations are far more visually literate than their forebears, while they rely less for entertainment and information on the traditional medium of the printed text. The ecclesial turn towards Pentecostalism in the twentieth century can also be seen as related to these other cultural shifts. It is perhaps no coincidence that the Pentecostal explosion began in Azusa Street, Los Angeles, California, at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> It has proceeded to become a global Christian phenomenon of unprecedented proportions, and millions of Christians have departed Protestant and Catholic denominations for Pentecostally influenced churches. BEM happened at a certain cultural moment, one which was fortuitous for the extent of formal agreement that BEM helped to realize between the churches involved in the process. However the goal advanced by BEM of recovering a more traditional relationship between Word and Sacrament, a goal which would bring Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox closer to each other as well as to their Christian forebears, has not been as extensively realized as was first envisaged. One element in the failure of this vision of liturgical convergence, as Vischer suggests, was that certain churches became more assertive of their own claim to ultimacy. Another and perhaps even more important element is the fact that Protestantism has also been undergoing profound changes as a consequence of the combined effects of global cultural change, secularization and religious innovation.

### Revisiting Lima in the twenty-first century

If we were to revisit the Lima documents, and even the Lima liturgy, what might be the lessons we could learn from the new situation in which the churches now find themselves? Perhaps the most significant insight from the discussion so far is that in the attempt of Faith and Order to recover the spirit of the liturgy (and above all its eucharistic shape) of the early church for Protestant communions across the world, not enough was done in BEM to indicate how different the early churches were in their practice from the medieval Roman Catholic Church against which Protestants had so strongly reacted in their abandonment of the eucharist as liturgical norm at the Reformation. The medieval domestication of the eucharist had increasingly privatized it and associated it with the individual celebration of the priest, and with individual acts of private penance among the worshippers.<sup>24</sup> While the BEM statements on the eucharist envisage the liturgy in a more communitarian mode than this, nonetheless not enough emphasis is given to the sense in which the eucharist is the church-constituting action of Christians, rather than the action of Christians when they meet together.

Secondly the eucharistic sections of BEM do not sufficiently emphasize the significance of the eucharist as a *meal* in which Christians partake in the restored shape of the divine creation inaugurated by the "new creation" of the resurrected body of Christ. In this respect recent moves in contemporary scholarship to recover the relationship between the eucharistic meal and the many and various meals which Christ ate with his disciples are highly significant.<sup>25</sup>

It may be that an emphasis on the church-constituting nature of the eucharist, on the importance of eucharist as a shared meal in which the whole creation is caught up, and on the presence of Christ realized among the faithful, might have offered resources which would have enabled Protestant churches to embrace more fully the



move towards eucharistic frequency. However, in view of the drift away from mainstream liberal Protestant denominations to the megachurches and neo-Pentecostal churches in the last three decades it must be admitted that even these emphases would not have answered the new situation. The emergent church forms of the twenty-first century look less and less like the churches of the first Christian eras, and any liturgical project whose primary motive is to recover the connection between the first eras and present Christian worship will inevitably fail to address this phenomenon.

Some of the emergent church leaders are beginning to seek ways of reconnecting with the sacramental and symbolic riches of the Christian liturgical tradition.<sup>26</sup> The danger though is that they see the tradition as a box of tricks from which particular artifacts can be extracted and displayed for effect, but in no particular order. Nonetheless the attempt of at least some, in what is known increasingly as the "emerging church movement", to recover elements of liturgical and sacramental tradition, albeit in new forms, indicates an element of a recovery from the earlier tendency to the populist commodification of worship, and the rejection of tradition in all forms.<sup>27</sup>

Whether a new Faith and Order process could assist in this recovery is doubtful however, since most of the megachurches and neo-Pentecostal churches are outside of the ecumenical movement and many even regard it with some suspicion. This new and growing fracture in world Christianity is a cause for concern and especially for those who see Christian communion as a crucial source for the peace and unity of all peoples on earth. However, the fact that Christianity shows signs of resurgence even in the midst of the dramatic changes in global cultures of the last thirty years is also cause for hope – especially if some among these new churches are beginning to recover and reconnect with the wisdom of the traditions of Christians in earlier eras, as it was so powerfully distilled in BEM.

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## Personal, Collegial and Synodal Responsibility in the Roman Catholic Church: What Convergences Are There Between Reception of Vatican II and BEM?

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Throughout his theological career as an ecumenist, which has been completely given over to Christian unity, Dr Lukas Vischer has continually paid sustained and clear-sighted attention to the reception of Vatican II within the Roman Catholic Church and its resultant ecclesiological expressions.<sup>1</sup> His enduring interest is easily explained: in his mid-thirties, when he was assistant study secretary within Faith and Order, he was given the privilege – despite his personal reservations – of being appointed as a WCC observer to the Second Vatican Council. He thus attended the four sessions of the Council. This enabled him to gain considerable knowledge of the workings of the Roman Catholic Church, a knowledge unparalleled among his colleagues, and to work subsequently at developing collaboration between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church.

That collaboration first took concrete form in the Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church (JWG), which was set up in 1965.<sup>2</sup> While membership of the Roman Catholic Church in the World Council of



Churches was considered on both sides to be unrealistic,<sup>3</sup> by contrast its official participation in the work of Faith and Order, presided over by Dr Vischer, met with no reservations. Since 1968 twelve Roman Catholic members, appointed by their church, have been part of the 120-member strong Faith and Order Plenary Commission. In the major undertaking of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), without doubt Faith and Order's greatest achievement, Vischer was able to count on Catholic theologians for their collaboration.

Because of Faith and Order's awareness, during the production of BEM, of the way the Catholic Church "actually works", I feel that a study of the reception by the Catholic Church of one of BEM's main recommendations – about where responsibility is exercised in the church in general – could be of some interest.

The recommendations which I shall examine are to be found in §26 of the Ministry text of BEM. There all the churches are requested to examine the structures established within their life for the carrying out of particular tasks and how responsibility for those tasks is allocated, depending on their nature, to "one individual", to "all", or to "some". (To be sure, that puts it in a language that is not exactly that of BEM, which prefers to speak of exercising ministry in a "personal", "collegial" and "communal" way.)

I allow myself to reproduce here this text in full, together with the accompanying commentary, so that the reader may appreciate how important a programme of ecumenical tasks it sets out (and not least for the Roman Catholic Church). An enquiry into the reception of the recommendation within the life of that church is all the more legitimate, in that the Catholic Church itself through its official representatives played a part in producing BEM and also officially produced its own reaction to it. The fact that BEM displays, moreover, some parallels with the reforming intentions of Vatican II makes such a study of even greater interest.

# **1. A challenge from BEM: where are personal, collegial and communal responsibilities located in the churches?**

Paragraph 26 of the Ministry text of BEM is addressed to all the churches and asks them what steps they could take within their own life, both in faithfulness to Tradition and to encourage progress towards unity on the part of all. It states:

The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way. It should be personal because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be collegial, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a communal dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

That paragraph is accompanied by the following commentary, which illustrates to what extent it is a fundamental ecumenical challenge:

These three aspects need to be kept together. In various churches, one or another has been over-emphasized at the expense of the others. In some churches, the personal dimension of the ordained ministry tends to diminish the collegial and communal dimensions. In other churches, the collegial or communal dimension takes so much importance that the ordained ministry loses its personal dimension. Each church needs to ask itself in

what way its exercise of the ordained ministry has suffered in the course of history.<sup>5</sup>

An appreciation of these three dimensions lies behind a recommendation made by the first World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne in 1927:

In view of (1) the place which the episcopate, the council of presbyters and the congregation of the faithful, respectively, had in the constitution of the early Church, and (2) the fact that episcopal, presbyteral and congregational systems of government are each today, and have been for centuries, accepted by great communions in Christendom, and (3) the fact that episcopal, presbyteral and congregational systems are each believed by many to be essential to the good order of the Church, we therefore recognize that these several elements must all, under conditions which require further study, have an appropriate place in the order of life of a reunited Church...<sup>6</sup>

The following paragraph (27) once again states the need for a correct relationship between the collegiality of ordained ministers and the synodal responsibility exercised by all:

Strong emphasis should be placed on the active participation of all members in the life and the decision-making of the community. At the regional level there is again need for an ordained minister exercising a service of unity. The collegial and communal dimensions will find expression in regular representative synodal gatherings.<sup>7</sup>

*A priori* these recommendations seem capable of reception by the Roman Catholic Church, and even express the sort of guidance which, in its own way, had already been provided two decades earlier by Vatican II. I want particularly to underline the

importance that the first chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church places on its trinitarian dimension. This fundamentally determines the relationship between "one", "all" and "some". In practice, then, the church as temple of the Holy Spirit has to cultivate mutual listening and common decision making – and it must be so, for all the gifts of the Holy Spirit can only be found in the church as a whole; no single Christian can monopolize them. In the same way, the Body of Christ is made up of a great diversity of members called to act in solidarity, as Paul stresses (1 Cor. 12:12-30). Finally, as the people of God, the Church is made up of all the baptized; to serve these baptized, some will be conferred with particular ministries for which they will receive specific gifts for the benefit of all.

Thus also the Second Vatican Council, during its long debates on episcopal collegiality, sought particularly to achieve a balance between the authority of "one individual" (the Pope) and the authority of "some" (the bishops gathered in college). Similarly, by deciding that the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church should mention the people of God (i.e. "all") before mentioning the ministries within it (i.e. the "some"), by reversing the initially proposed order, the Council, at least in principle, acknowledged the need to reassert "the active participation of all members in the life and the decision-making of the community" (in the words of BEM quoted above). On this basis it could have been expected that the Catholic Church would warmly welcome that recommendation into its own structures. To be sure, timing precluded BEM from being taken into consideration in the preparatory work on canon law reform, for the revised Latin code was promulgated in 1983; but the preliminary work for the promulgation of the Code of the Canons of the Eastern Churches (1990) remained silent on the BEM recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

More surprisingly, in its forty-page official Response to BEM, the Catholic Church makes no direct reference to the recommendation as having any reference to its own structures. We can, however, note with satisfaction that there is general positive

appreciation, in dogmatic terms, of the position of ordained ministers in the Church. It begins by singling out "the significant trinitarian, christological and ecclesiological aspects of the text" and then adds:

We appreciate the fact that ordained ministry is not treated in isolation, but rather in a wider ecclesiological context, in its relationship to the Church as people of God, to its unity, apostolicity and its existence as a local community.<sup>10</sup>

However, there is no specific comment on "Ministry", §26. It is simply stated in passing that it is possible to recognize in BEM at this point the guiding principles for the exercise of the ordained ministry through the ages.<sup>11</sup> It is possible simply to conclude from this that the Catholic Response does receive the *words* of BEM but, I venture to say, does not seem to see any need or relevance to give reception to the *contents* of the text. How can we understand and evaluate this paradox?

II. How is it possible to explain the failure of the Catholic Church to respond to the suggestions in BEM, "Ministry", §26, which are, moreover, parallel to the requests for synodality and collegiality made by Vatican II?

### *II.1 The parallels in the requests for synodality and collegiality between BEM and Vatican II*

When BEM recommends that "strong emphasis should be placed on the active participation of all members in the life and the decision-making of the community" and that this should "find expression in regular representative synodal gatherings", it is in accord (presumably without any deliberate harmonization) with Vatican II's characteristic concern to give higher profile to local churches or dioceses, and not only to their bishop. On both sides we

can perceive a common concern to reassert the importance of synods in the life of the Church. Similarly, when Vatican II wishes to raise the profile of bishops vis-à-vis the Holy See, we can clearly see, again without deliberate harmonization, convergence with the BEM statement that "In some churches, the personal dimension of the ordained ministry tends to diminish the collegial and communal dimensions". Even if the wording does not have exactly the same meaning on each side, we see again a common concern to reassert collegiality.

Since the best ecumenical work is that which one does within one's own church, I shall now follow the development of these two issues within the Roman Catholic Church since the publication of BEM.<sup>12</sup>

### *II.2 Synodality in the local church*

#### *II.2.1 Paul VI – the first steps*

From 1966 onwards, through his *motu proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* in which he sought to implement the decisions of Vatican II, Paul VI laid the first foundations for enabling a diocese to become the subject of rights through the opportunities given to various bodies within it to become partners with the bishop in its governance. Everywhere there were thus set up, to assist the bishop, presbyteral councils representing priests (15), and pastoral councils representing the whole people of God and competent to make comprehensive recommendations on the life of the local church (16). The same document also paved the way for a better integration of the many religious orders in the Catholic Church into the life of local churches (22-40). It can further be noted that responsibility for the diocese was henceforth more important than the person of the bishop, since an age limit was introduced for bishops, and auxiliary bishops were at the same time more fully integrated into diocesan structures.

There is, however, a surprising silence in the document. There is no mention of a diocesan synod, which indicates that a limited

reception was given to the priority in *Lumen Gentium* to the people of God *vis-à-vis* their ministers. A better balance has been achieved between "one individual", "some" and "all", but the sole figure of the bishop remains dominant, for the bishop retains full powers – as the revised Code was later to confirm.

## II.2.2 *The 1983 Code of Canon Law confirms the full authority of the bishop alone*

The 1983 Code did not change the balance in the relationship established by Paul VI between "one individual" and "the some". It confirmed the new institutions as having a purely consultative role, whereas the bishop had full authority given to himself alone, with the exception of the rights of the Holy See. To illustrate how, in BEM's terms, "the personal dimension of the ordained ministry tends to diminish the collegial and communal dimensions",<sup>13</sup> I shall examine the role of the local church in the election of its bishop and the status of the diocesan synod. The significance of these two examples will set us free from going into complex legal details, which would simply confirm that "one individual", i.e. the bishop, has absolutely preponderant powers over "all": he holds in their entirety the three powers of magisterium, order and jurisdiction,<sup>14</sup> and he has to give account of himself to the Pope alone.<sup>15</sup> According to law, the local church has no way of expressing its opinion in the election of its bishop.

According to the provisions of the 1983 Code (Canon 377, para. 2), the bishops alone are able to draw up lists of those eligible for the episcopate. They have to work in strict secrecy, and they are thus forbidden to seek the opinion of any diocesan body collectively (such as a synod or council). They may consult only individuals. It is for the *munio* (canon 364, para. 4) to take account of the lists drawn up by the bishops in putting forward three names (the *terna*) for the vacant see. Usually, but without being compelled to, the Pope chooses the bishop proposed to him by the Congregation of Bishops, which has a vetting role.<sup>16</sup>

The method of choosing bishops has varied considerably in the course of history, and it would be difficult to determine empirically whether their quality is dependent on the way in which they have been elected. The issue is not a moral but an ecclesiological one: is sufficient respect being given to the relation between the responsibility of "all" and the responsibility of "one individual"?

The law in force (canon 337, para. 1), which reserves the appointment of bishops to the Pope is recent. Until 1917, the written law – which, it must be said, was mostly not observed – conferred that responsibility on the local church in question. It is, I believe, not only recent but also hardly in accord with the most ancient tradition, as expressed in the oldest known ordination rite, that of Hippolytus (which could possibly reflect a Roman practice, and which is in any case recalled in the fifth century by St Celestine and St Leo the Great in the powerful axiom that "the one who is to preside over all is to be elected by all").<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately BEM is of no great help for us to recover the necessary balances in these areas, for it uses moral rather than ecclesiological terminology to object to ordained ministers being "autocrats or impersonal functionaries", on the grounds that "they are bound to the faithful in interdependence and reciprocity".<sup>18</sup> Similarly, it has already been noted that "ordained ministers ... cannot dispense with the recognition, the support and the encouragement of the community".<sup>19</sup>

At the risk of being harsh, I cannot refrain from stating that section V of BEM, "Ministry", which is devoted to ordination to the ministry, hardly departs from commonplaces on the issue shared by both Catholics and Protestants at present. Thus, taking as our yardstick the traditional idea of ordination,<sup>20</sup> as evidenced in the different rites, it is to be regretted that:

- It does not include election by the ecclesia as an essential element in ordination.
- Because it remains silent on this first point, the candidate's call<sup>21</sup> seems to come directly from God,

leaving no place for election, and is thus a private matter. It even speaks of "a personal awareness of a call from the Lord to dedicate oneself to the ordained ministry"<sup>22</sup> and, correspondingly of "candidates"<sup>23</sup> whose "call is tested, fostered and confirmed".<sup>24</sup>

– Unsurprisingly, ordination is consequently regarded as "an acknowledgment by the Church of the gifts of the Spirit in the one ordained"<sup>25</sup> – a reductionist concept from the point of view of Catholic theology, in which ordination cannot be reduced to the public recognition of already existing charisms. Similarly, can it really be presented as a bilateral "commitment by both the Church and the ordinand"?<sup>26</sup>

### *II.2.2.1 Conditions for ecumenical progress in the relationship between "one individual" and "all" in admission to the ministry*

On the Catholic side, the involvement of the Church in the choice of its bishop, an issue with wide implications, has made no progress since Vatican II. However, in the spirit of BEM, which regrets that the "ordained ministry" can, in some churches, lose "its personal dimension", one is drawn to enquire whether those churches have made any progress towards a personalized *episcopate*. It would be interesting to consider whether the two initiatives that BEM wished to encourage will continue to stagnate until we arrive together at a more lively awareness of the basic *structures* of ordination. In the act of ordination, all the members of the *ecclesia* should be bound closely together. Classically, ordination included election by the whole people; testimony by the clergy and judgment by the bishops of neighbouring churches (with also, since the Council of Nicea, the consensus of the metropolitan);<sup>27</sup> as well as the laying on of hands by a single bishop in the context of the *epiklesis* on the part of all.<sup>28</sup>

By this token, the personal authority of the one bishop is located at one and the same time within the Church and *vis-à-vis* the

Church, framed in the setting of the responsibility of "all" in the local church and of "some", who are the bishops of the province with the metropolitan at their head.<sup>29</sup> Would it not be possible for such a common "platform" to clear away diametrically opposed misunderstandings, and allow convergence to be reached in the relationship between "all" and "some"?

### *II.2.3 Under John Paul II: the limiting of the competence of diocesan synods*

Following the lines of Vatican II, the 1983 Code restored diocesan synods in quite a remarkable way, since they gather around the bishop the whole body of diocesan officials as well as the representatives of the people of God – in which the majority can be lay people – in order to deliberate on all issues concerning the life of the local church. It states specifically that all "matters on the agenda will be subject to free debate by its members in sessions of the synod" (canon 465). Finally, the bishop, who is alone competent to promulgate decisions, can promulgate only those adopted by the meeting. However, this considerable innovation in favour of responsibility of all is subject to two restrictions: the frequency with which the synod should meet is not laid down, and the bishop is never bound by its deliberations.

In reality, however, John-Paul II considered this new balance between bishop and synod was inconvenient in practice. In fact, synods have – at least in the Western churches – made requests that could be disturbing, such as the desire to see married men ordained, or to find a more satisfactory policy for remarried divorcees, or indeed to see women ordained as deaconesses or, less frequently, as priests. Therein lies an explanation for the Instruction on Diocesan Synods (1997), issued jointly by the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, which forbids synods even to express a simple "request for submission to the Holy See", if it departs from "the theses or positions held by the perpetual teaching of the Church or the pontifical magisterium, or concerning



disciplinary matters belonging to a higher, or any other, ecclesiastical authority."<sup>30</sup>

The examples given above fall precisely within those "disciplinary matters belonging to a higher ... ecclesiastical authority". Even in those areas where many matters are doctrinally neutral diocesan synods are to cultivate conformity with the "universal Church".<sup>31</sup> To avoid misunderstandings in this regard, it should be noted that in Catholic ecclesiology many disciplinary measures are regarded as practical measures, thereby not establishing a doctrinal standard. This is an important distinction, with which non-Catholics are often unfamiliar.<sup>32</sup>

Since the same causes produce the same effects, it is now possible to arrive at an explanation for why the same disciplinary concerns<sup>33</sup> have led to slowing down, as it seems to me, quite considerably, the development of episcopal collegiality and of the idea of the communion of the Church as a "communion of churches" (*communio ecclesiarum*), which is related to it.

### II.3 "One individual" and "all" throughout the whole Church: collegiality after Vatican II

#### II.3.1 Episcopal collegiality: a key provision in Vatican II's institutional reforms

The theologians at work in Vatican II viewed the vote in favour of collegiality as "the backbone of the whole Council" and "Vatican II's centre of gravity".<sup>34</sup> The future Cardinal Congar even wrote that by their vote "one had the feeling that the job was done. Vatican II had counterbalanced Vatican I ... by a majority that was never below 87%".<sup>35</sup> According to Congar, Vatican II had thus achieved its aim:

... to give to the episcopate greater importance and initiative in the actual governing of the Church, which is at present dominated by a degree of exercise of papal primacy, involving the system of the Curia and

centralization on Rome,<sup>36</sup> [a system which] is a stumbling block to all the other churches, who imagine papal power to be absolute and monarchical.<sup>37</sup>

In a lecture given in Zurich a few months later, in tandem with Lukas Vischer, Joseph Ratzinger expressed the same hope as Fr Congar: "Thus the monarchical, unilateral and ultimately profane model that has dominated the Catholic Church, too unilaterally and for centuries, will be replaced by another much more nuanced model."<sup>38</sup>

In this readjustment between primacy and collegiality attempted by Vatican II, we thus find an ecclesiological convergence with Faith and Order in 1927, and then in 1982 – that is, in the quest for a more correct balance between the responsibility of "one individual" (the Pope) among "all" (the bishops). Unfortunately, post-conciliar difficulties have not enabled these doctrinal convergences to be incorporated into the structures of the Church.

#### II.3.2 The revised Code emphasizes the authority of the Holy See alone over the bishops and over each bishop

Vatican II reaches that bishops are "vicars and legates of Christ" and "not are they to be regarded as vicars of the Roman Pontiff" (*Lumen Gentium*, 27). However, the revised Code does not incorporate those provisions. It continues to reserve to the Pope the title of "vicar of Christ and pastor of the entire Church" (canon 331), so that even for bishops "there is no appeal or recourse against a judgment or decree of the Roman Pontiff" (canon 333, para. 3). It further specifies that "it belongs to the Roman Pontiff, according to the needs of the Church, to choose and promote the forms according to which the college of bishops will collegially exercise their charge towards the entire Church" (canon 337, para. 3), thus inferring decisively the priority of "one individual" over "all".<sup>39</sup>



II.3.3 During the 1990s the role and status of bishops in the Church have been downgraded, and the understanding of the Church as a communion of churches has been downplayed

This is not the place to describe the aftermath of the Council, some of the episodes of which have not yet disappeared from the memory of the Church, such as whole episcopates distancing themselves and expressing strong dissent from the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968), which condemned the use of the contraceptive pill, or even the anarchic developments in some churches, such as in Holland.

Not being able to rely on the support of the Curia, which had been subjected to harsh testing in the course of the Council, Pope Paul VI could use only exhortation to obtain unity of views among the bishops. By contrast, while appearing to take little interest in his administrative tasks, John-Paul II was able to count on a considerably strengthened Curia<sup>40</sup> that with him regained its central role.

II.3.3.1 The Church and the churches do not exist simultaneously, for the Church is antecedent to the churches

A series of disciplinary documents issued between 1992 and 2003 are based on a quite central statement in the Instruction *Communiois Notio*, with the aim of clarifying the statement in *Lumen Gentium* 23 that "It is in these [particular churches] and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists." That statement by the Council is not denied. It is of great importance, both pastorally and ecumenically, for it enables the Church to be viewed at one and the same time as a single Church and as a communion of churches. But it seems to create difficulties in that it complicates the solving of internal conflicts, which would be more easily settled, in theory and in practice, if the key axiom of *Communiois notio* was adopted, which states: "[The universal Church] is a reality ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular Church."<sup>41</sup>

Such an axiom is certainly correct if its intention is to state that no church can claim to be Catholic without being in communion with the entire Church, that is, the network of *traditio-receptio* that constitutes the *Catholicity* through time and space. It is clear, however, that that axiom discourages us from understanding the Catholic Church as a communion of churches (*communio ecclesiarum*). Moreover, the argument used as its basis is hardly convincing:

...ontologically ... the Church that is one and unique, precedes creation(42), and gives birth to the particular Churches as her daughters. She expresses herself in them; she is the mother and not the product of the particular Churches. ... From the Church, which in its origins and its first manifestation is universal, have arisen the different local Churches, as particular expressions of the one unique Church of Jesus Christ. Arising within and out of the universal Church, they have their ecclesiality in it and from it. Hence the formula of the Second Vatican Council: *The Church in and formed out of the Churches* (*Ecclesia in et ex Ecclesiis*)(44), is inseparable from this other formula: *The Churches in and formed out of the Church* (*Ecclesia in et ex Ecclesiis*)(45).<sup>42</sup>

Without examining all the reservations aroused among Catholic ecclesiologists<sup>43</sup> by that text, I can single out the "friendly dispute" (in the sense of a mediaeval university dispute) that followed from it between Cardinal Ratzinger and Cardinal Kasper in the form of a public exchange that honours the Roman Curia. Cardinal Kasper did not find it very convincing to have recourse to the universal Church as mother vis-à-vis local diocesan churches,<sup>44</sup> and for the following reason in particular:

The formulation becomes completely problematic if the one universal Church is surreptitiously (unter den Hand) identified with the Church of Rome – de facto with the Pope and the Curia. If that is the case, then the Letter of

the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith cannot be understood as an aid towards clarifying the ecclesiology of communion, but rather it is to be understood as its abandonment (*Verabschiedung*) and as an attempt to provide a theological basis for restoring Roman centralization.<sup>45</sup>

### II.3.3.2 *The stress on the priority of the universal Church results in downgrading the status of bishops' conferences*

Whatever the doctrinal aspect of the issue may be<sup>46</sup> it has, in the area of discipline,<sup>47</sup> been used as an argument to downgrade the canonical status – admittedly already modest – of bishops' conferences. It might perhaps have been possible for them to be developed along the lines of the ancient patriarchates,<sup>48</sup> as *Lumen Gentium* 23 seems to desire in its concluding paragraph. The *motu proprio Apostolos Suos* (1998) presents them in a very different light: for the Pope, their canonical existence has as its foundation an act of the Holy See, which institutes them and establishes their powers (paras 13 and 20).<sup>49</sup>

The magisterium of one single bishop is surer than the magisterium exercised by several bishops together. In the same *motu proprio* John-Paul II removes from bishops' conferences the authentic magisterium that they had been exercising according to canon 753 of the Latin Code, with the sole exception of when they are unanimous.<sup>50</sup>

The bishops "meeting in the bishops' conference" are expected "to ensure above all that the magisterium of the universal Church is followed and to make it known as opportunity presents to the people entrusted to them" (para. 21). In short, they are to pass on the teaching of the Holy See,<sup>51</sup> which reserves to itself the strict control of the interpretation of the Christian faith in the cultures of the whole world.<sup>52</sup> However, nothing has been changed in the magisterium of the individual bishop, which is still recognized by the Holy See as authentic within his diocese.<sup>53</sup> In the relationship

between the doctrinal responsibility of "some" and of "one individual" such a provision seems strange.<sup>54</sup>

The college of bishops as such has priority over the churches over which they preside.

Conforming, it seems, with the logic of the chronological and ontological priority of the universal Church vis-à-vis particular churches, *Apostolos Suos* also teaches that "The college of bishops is an entity prior to a bishop's responsibility for a particular church as its head." It adduces as proof of this the high number of Catholic bishops not having a diocese.<sup>55</sup> It is highly unlikely that this axiom, mentioned incidentally in a text on discipline, will have a great future, but nevertheless we should note that there is here a major divergence between BEM and this development in Catholic ecclesiology, for it thus seems to be possible to be a bishop totally apart from having any relationship with a real church. Here again there is hardly any relationship between "one individual" and "all" anymore.

Conclusion: the "one" and the "all". If the analysis of the above documents is not too incorrect, it can be seen that, in the area of discipline, statements constantly favour "one individual" over against "some" or "all", both at diocesan level and at the level of the whole Church. The developments described above have not gone in the direction desired by BEM – nor in the direction anticipated by Vatican II. However, since it is above all a matter of discipline, this trend does not seem irreversible, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in my general conclusion.

### III. General conclusion

This train of thought inevitably raises several concerns. The first is what we ought to call "non-reception"; ecumenists who do not wish to delude themselves will admit that "Ministry", §26 has had hardly any influence in the day-to-day life of the Roman Catholic

Church, despite the fact that that church shared in the process of the production and reception of the document. Because it is important, in the life of the Church as elsewhere, to learn from one's failures I shall now attempt by way of conclusion to identify some of the reasons for this. I hope that this will help interested readers to arrive at their own diagnosis.

*We have considered it sufficient to receive texts without committing ourselves to the implementation of their contents.* It seems that the Catholic Church had hardly any problem in receiving BEM as a declaration of intent – after all, the church approved BEM in its Response. Nevertheless it has not, I believe, acted in accord with what the text actually says. This is despite the fact that circumstances were in BEM's favour, because of the very real parallels between certain intentions in BEM and declarations of Vatican II. Such a reception of BEM "on the surface" is certainly not unique to the Catholic Church, but is characteristic of many if not most churches.

How can this situation be remedied? Surely by requiring the churches which sign such joint declarations to enter into a commitment to *implement* them,<sup>56</sup> for all the churches not to be content with receiving the doctrinal results of joint declarations, but also to *act* in accordance with them. This could involve all churches listing a certain number of real reforms to be enacted, at least in the medium term, and giving a deadline for review, so that all churches can evaluate what has been achieved and, if they have failed to meet their goals, discover the reasons why this is so. That would not only be instructive but would also probably be in accordance with the truth of which the gospel speaks and which, according to St John, is truth to be acted on: "Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light" (John 3:21). We should note that it does *not* say that those who see clearly, necessarily do what is right. We do not possess the light, but we move forward into it; that is true not only for individual Christians, but also for the community of Christians, that is, the Church.

There are, of course, other reasons for non-reception, particularly theological reasons. It would be simplistic to think, as might be gathered from the above analysis, that this failure has been due to circumstances such as "post-conciliar difficulties", or to "old power structures". The above investigation, although cursory, has enabled us to detect what I believe are two significant theological weaknesses in the daily life of the Catholic Church. On the one hand although the Church seems – especially when seen from outside – to be governed legally in a very decisive way, it is not quite sure that it has a proper theological understanding of its canon law. On the other hand we can, I believe, detect a certain weakness in its understanding of the place of the Holy Spirit in its life as a church.

*Without a theology of canon law, and without an epistemological renewal of its discipline, the ecumenical commitment of the Roman Catholic Church will necessarily remain weak.* To be sure the relationship between canonical discipline and doctrine is problematic, as is also the fact that the two are frequently dissociated. That is a fundamental issue, and not simply a problem of communication between the Catholic Church and its ecumenical partners.

In the days immediately after Vatican II, Paul VI produced some notable guidelines for a theological approach to canon law. Unfortunately these remained a dead letter,<sup>57</sup> or almost so, in the production of the Code promulgated in 1983.<sup>58</sup> While everyone refers to the pioneering work on the theology of canon law by Klaus Mörsdorf, an equally widespread diagnosis holds that there is still a gap between canon law and the theological understanding of canon law within the church and its life. This has been described by Professor R. Sobanski, of the university of Warsaw,<sup>59</sup> by the late Mgr E. Corecco, professor at the university of Fribourg and later bishop of Lugano,<sup>60</sup> and by Professor R. Metz<sup>61</sup> and Professor J. Heffmann<sup>62</sup> of the university of Strasbourg, who all share the analysis of A.M. Rouco Varela (at that time professor at Salamanca and later cardinal archbishop of Madrid), deploring the fact that

that "there exists no systematic Catholic theology of canon law as a specific discipline."<sup>63</sup>

The alarm sounded already 35 years ago by L. Bouyer concerning the methodological deficiency of canon law as a discipline is still valid today. He pleaded, as I myself have after him,<sup>64</sup> for an "historical and theological study of the canonical tradition" and emphasized that "to suppose that we could today in the Catholic Church construct a satisfactory ecclesiology, and particularly one with ecumenical dimensions, without having its undertake such an investigation, is an illusion that can only be described as catastrophic."<sup>65</sup> Such a project would be eminently ecumenical both in the direction of the churches of the East<sup>66</sup> and in the direction of the churches of the West.<sup>67</sup>

*Catholic ecclesiology still needs to develop its pneumatological dimension in order to grow ecumenically.* It is not a new thing to detect certain pneumatological weaknesses in Catholic ecclesiology. It is striking that in his lecture in Zurich mentioned above, presented in tandem with J. Ratzinger, Dr Lukas Vischer gave a lucid diagnosis of the situation.<sup>68</sup> The key to the relationship between the responsibilities of "one individual", "all" and "some" is to be found, obviously, in the theology of the Holy Spirit. It is equally clear that all these texts which have the aim of establishing the priority of the universal Church over regional churches allowed no significant place for those churches – which, according to the Pentecost narrative, are to be responses to the gospel heard in their own language and their own culture. Similarly, the bishops' conferences have not followed the path indicated by the model of the ancient patriarchates, but are being treated as administrative groupings of episcopal areas. Such a matrix, as Dr Vischer clearly saw, is incapable of bearing ecumenical fruit.<sup>69</sup>

*For Christians seeking unity, circumstances will always be favourable if they listen to their brothers and sisters.* This essay has not concealed the fact that time has been lost. A number of Catholic theologians even think that the understanding of the episcopate has actually regressed in their church.<sup>70</sup> However, by humbly accepting its

historic condition, the Church does learn to "advance through trials and tribulations" (*Lumen Gentium*, 9) and to "overcome, in patience and in love, her sorrows and her difficulties, both those that are from within and those that are from without" (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). That same existence in history also offers times which are favourable for the Church.

Perhaps we are living in such a time, given that the last Pope in his encyclical on unity stressed that "together, of course," he wishes to work at this "immense task ... which I cannot carry out by myself" to find "the forms in which this ministry [of the papacy] may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned" (*Ut Unum Sint*, 95 and 96).<sup>71</sup> Or, when a theologian who is now Pope wrote while still a cardinal:

Not is it possible, on the other hand, for him [the Catholic theologian] to regard as the only possible form and, consequently, as binding on all Christians the form this primacy has taken in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. ... In other words, Rome must not require more from the East with respect to the doctrine of primacy than had been formulated and was lived in the first millennium.<sup>72</sup>

Whatever the trials and tribulations of history, we profit by listening to the voices of our brothers and sisters, for the Holy Spirit can speak to us through them. Ecumenical dialogue is one way of listening to one another, and it requires *ascetic* and humility. For this we should thank "the Lord of Ages [who] wisely and patiently follows out the plan of his grace on our behalf, sinners that we are" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1).<sup>73</sup>

We can be sure that the challenge posed in "Ministry", §26 will continue to encourage responses and developments – and not only in the Catholic Church, but in all the churches which contributed to the production of BEM.



## NOTES

1. See for example, his article twenty years after the end of the Council: "The reception of the debate on collegiality", in *The reception of Vatican II*, ed. by G. Alberigo et al., Washington DC, Catholic University of America Press, 1987, pp.233-248, but also, already in 1964, his address in Zurich, in tandem with Joseph Ratzinger, "Die Kirche und die Kirchen", in *Reformatio*, 13, 1964/2, pp.67-84 (in which he demonstrated how very aware he already was of the issue of episcopal collegiality), or in his conclusion to a special edition of *Concilium* 2005/4, a (critical) assessment of *Gaudium et Spes*, which ends with an appeal to respond together to the challenges posed by the signs of the times (the English edition has been published as "Humanity – Centre and Summit of the Earth", in *Concilium*, (Vatican II: A Forgotten Future?), 2004/5, ed. by Alberto Melloni and Christoph Theobald, London, SCM-Canterbury Press, 2005, pp.148-152). In between, he also participated with "The Council as an Event in the Ecumenical Movement", in *History of Vatican II: Volume 5, The Council and the Transition: the Fourth Period and the End of the Council, September 1965 – December 1965*, ed. by G. Alberigo, English version ed. by Joseph A. Komonchak, Maryknoll, Orbis and Leuven, Peeters, 2006, pp.485-539.
2. Cf. T. Stransky, "Joint Working Group", in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. by Nicholas Lossky et al., 2nd edition, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2002, pp.623-624.
3. Cf. J. Groeters, "An unfinished agenda: the question of Roman Catholic membership of the World Council of Churches, 1968-1975 – WCC-Roman Catholic Relations: Two Historical Perspectives" in *The Ecumenical Review*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, vol. 49, no. 3, July 1997, pp.305-347, which refers to a letter that raised the issue of membership at Uppsala: "I think the WCC authorities were as much afraid of the Roman Catholic Church's eventual membership as the latter was of becoming a member. In fact, the examination of a possible restructuring that would allow the Catholic Church to participate was never taken very far."
4. BEM, "Ministry", §26.
5. BEM, "Ministry", §26, Commentary.
6. *Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne, 1927*, ed. by H.N. Bate, Leichworth, The Garden City Press, 1927, p.469.
7. BEM, "Ministry", §27.
8. The respective organs (*Communications* and *Nuntia*) in which the two preparatory commissions for the new Codes reported on their work make no mention of BEM, which also had the support of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches.

9. *Churches respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Text"*, vol. VI, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Papers No. 144, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1988, p.25.
10. *Ibid.*, p.26.
11. *Ibid.*, p.31 "The description of guiding principles for the exercise of the ordained ministry (26-27) [...] bring together various elements [...] in which one recognizes the practice of the Church through the ages".
12. For what follows see the author's article, "Forty Years Later: What has become of the Ecclesiological Reforms envisaged by Vatican II?", in *Concilium*, 2005/4 (a language multi-lingual journal), in English in *Vatican II: A Forgotten Future?*, Merrick, SCM-Canterbury Press, 2006, pp.57-72, and in a more detailed fashion, his two monographs about the results of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, "Les églises, les Églises locales et l'Église entière", in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 85, 2001, pp.461-509, and "La théologie des Églises sœurs. Réflexions ecclésiologiques autour de la Déclaration de Balamand", *ibid.*, 88, 2004, pp.461-496.
13. BEM, "Ministry", §26, Commentary.
14. See Canon 381, §1: "A diocesan bishop in the diocese entrusted to him has all ordinary, proper, and immediate power."; Canon 391, §1: "It is for the diocesan bishop to govern the particular church entrusted to him with legislative, executive, and judicial power according to the norm of law."
15. One should not give too much importance to Cardinal Schönböck's witticism, according to which "Bishops are accountable to no one other than the Pope. And the Pope is accountable to no one other than Jesus", in *The Tablet* 24, November 2003, p.1658. However, this comment was made by a person who was secretary of the synod of bishops, and may therefore express a certain way of thinking.
16. Note the existence of specific procedures in the case of the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite (cf. *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, can. 180-186) as well as in twenty or so dioceses in the Germanic countries where the Concordat agreements reserve the election to the Chapter of Canons according to differing procedures, discussed in *Les désignations épiscopales dans le droit contemporain*, J.L. Haeroul, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1977, pp.25-30, or, more recently, B. Pinnersthöfer, "La nomina dei Vescovi nell'Austria e Svizzera", in *Il processo di adeguazione dei Vescovi. Storia, legislazione e prassi*, ed. by J.A. Gutierrez, Rome, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996, pp.511-539; P.V.A. Braida, "Elezione e nomina dei vescovi in Svizzera", *ibid.*, pp.533-559.
17. Hippolytus, *On the Apostolic Tradition* 2: "Let him be ordained bishop who has been chosen by all the people", in *Early Sources of the Liturgy*, ed. by L. Deiss, tr. by H. Werthehead, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1975; orig. pub. 1963, pp.2-3; S. Caetan, *Epist.* 4, 5 (PL 50,434): "Let a bishop not be imposed upon the people

whom they do not want", S. Leo, *Ad Anast.* (PL 54, 634): "*qui praefurunt ut omnibus, ab omnibus eligatur*".

18. BEM, "Ministry", §16.

19. BEM, "Ministry", §12.

20. See, for example, H. Legrand, "Theology and the Election of Bishops in the Early Church", in *Concilium* No. 77, 1972.

21. BEM, "Ministry", §47.

22. *Ibid.*, §45.

23. *Ibid.*, §§47, 50.

24. *Ibid.*, §47. On this concept of vocation (which was still objected to by St Paul X at the beginning of the 20th century), see H. Legrand, "La théologie de la vocation aux ministères ordonnés: vocation ou appel?", in *La Vie spirituelle* 75, 1998, pp. 621-640.

25. BEM, "Ministry", §44.

26. *Ibid.*

27. See the careful investigation of the canonical-liturgical terms by T. Osera, *Das Bischofsweiheverfahren bei Gyprian: Historische Untersuchungen zu den Begriffen iudicium, suffragium, testimonium, consensus*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1983, and the monumental study conducted by J. F. Puglisi under the supervision of the present author, *The Process of Admission to Ordained Ministry: A Comparative Study, Epistemological Principles and Roman Catholic Rites*, vol. I, 1996, vol. II, 1998, vol. III, 2001, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press.

28. Cf. Hippolytus, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, *op. cit.*: "And all shall keep silence, praying in their hearts for the descent of the Spirit, after which one of the bishops present, being asked by all, shall lay his hand on him who is being ordained bishop, and pray, saying thus: ..."

29. This role given to a primate foreign to the local situation can offer the local churches greater freedom in the choice of their bishop in situations of pressure from totalitarian or dictatorial regimes. This explains why Catholics remain attached to the idea that their bishops are appointed in collaboration with Rome.

30. *Instructio de Synodis dioecesis agenda*, n. IV, 4, AAS 89, 1997, 706-727.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Catholic theologians on the other hand have been trained to make such distinctions, as can be seen in the classic work *Valer des décisions doctrinales et disciplinaires du Saint-Siège*, L. Choupin, SJ, Beauchesne, Paris, 1907<sup>1</sup>, 1913<sup>2</sup>, 1929<sup>3</sup> which is even more reliable in that it was drawn up during the modernist crisis, it saw several editions. See also, more recently *Papal and Concil Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the "Code of Canon Law"*, R. G. Morrissey, Ottawa, Faculty of Canon Law, 1995.

33. Disciplinary issues have greater importance in the Catholic Church which is

made up of no less than 1.1 billion members drawn from all cultures of the world. It is easier for churches of the Reformation, which normally take decisions at the level of the nation, which is relatively homogenous culturally, to introduce innovations.

34. Without citing his sources, Cardinal Eyr attributes the first proposal to U. Betti, and the second to A. Wenger, "La collegialité épiscopale", in *Le deuxième concile du Vatican 1959-1965*, Collection de l'École Française de Rome 113, Rome, 1989, p. 54.

35. *Le concile au jour le jour: Troisième session*, Y. Congar, Paris, Le Cerf, 1964, p. 44.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

37. *Le concile au jour le jour*, Y. Congar, Paris, Le Cerf, 1963, p. 18.

38. J. Ratzinger, "Die Kirche und die Kirchen", in *Reformatio* 13, 1964/2, pp. 85-105, here p. 92.

39. This formulation, in fact, is in conformity with Ch. III of *Lumen Gentium*, on which K. Rahner comments as follows: "And again, *in praxi*, is not the initiative and the authority of the college reduced to a mere fiction, if the Pope is always free to repress its activities? Needless to say, this latter point is decisive in any canonical discussion about the primacy and the synodical structure of the Church", *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II Vol. I*, ed. by Herbert Begenleiter, Herder and Herder, New York, 1967, p. 202.

40. Following Vatican II it saw a growth without precedent. Its personnel doubled, while there are 2,500 dioceses, there are now 2,400 members of the Curia. The number of bishops in the Curia has increased five-fold compared to the time of Pius XII: there are now more than 80, a sort of permanent synod, compared to 14 in 1954, including the cardinals.

41. Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church understood as Communion, *Communio in Notio*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993, §9.

42. *Ibid.*

43. These number more than 30, in all languages, as demonstrated by Arturo Escobar, "La priorità della Chiesa universale sulla Chiesa particolare", in *Amenamur* 77, 2002, 503-553; there is only one that approved of the formulation of *Communio in Notio*, without further explanation. This list can be found in H. Legrand, "La théologie des Églises seurs. Réflexions ecclésiologiques autour de la Déclaration de Balamand", *art. cit.* note 12 above. The title "*mater et magistra*" of all the faithful signifies something else (cf. *Lactan* IV, cc. 2, 4, 5). Only Clément VI of Avignon (1342-1352) has claimed that "The Roman Church (and not the universal church) instituted all of the patriarchs, metropolitans, cathedrals and all of the dignitaries of whatever rank within them. Its pastor and master, the Roman Pontiff should have full disposition over all of the churches, dignitaries, offices and



ecclesiastical benefits", Baronius, *Annales Ecclesiastici*, ed. by Theiner, t. 25, Barle Duc, 1872, p. 350.

44. The motherhood of the Church with regard to the faith of its members is attested to in the tradition (cf. K. Delahaye, "Ecclesia mater chez les Pères des premiers siècles", in *Unam Sanctam* 46, Paris, Le Cerf, 1964), as is the maternity of the foundational Church with respect to that which she founds. But the title "mater et magistra" of all the faithful (cf. Lactantius IV, cc. 2, 4, 5) is not to be confused with the maternity of the universal Church with respect to the local churches; the last idea seems to have never been formulated. One can note a similar, though not identical, idea in the thought of Clément VI of Avignon. For financial reasons – the reconquest of his States of Italy under the control of his rival – he makes the above-mentioned claim (see note 43).

45. "Zur Theologie und Praxis des bischöflichen Amtes", in *Auf neue Art Kirche sein: Wirklichkeiten-Herausforderungen-Wandlungen*, ed. by W. Schreier and G. Stegmüller, 1999, p. 44.

46. A good summary of this debate that took place in three stages can be found in K. McDonnell, "The Ratzinger/Kasper Debate: The Universal Church and Local Churches", in *Theological Studies* 63, 2002, pp. 227-250.

47. The only support that is invoked for this new thesis is from an address of John Paul II to the bishops of the USA at a moment of tension between them and the Holy See (11 September 1987, n. 3), repeated in an address to the Roman Curia (29 December 1990), AAS 83, 1991, pp. 745-747.

48. According to no. 20 for the joint exercise of their pastoral ministry in conference "to be legitimate and binding on the individual Bishops, there is needed the intervention of the supreme authority of the Church which, through universal law or particular mandates, entrusts determined questions to the deliberation of the Episcopal Conference".

49. No. 23 "This variety of local [patriarchal] churches with one common aspiration is splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church. In the manner the episcopal bodies of today are in a position to render a manifold and fruitful assistance, so that this collegiate feeling may be put into practical application."

50. No. IV, art. 12: "In order that the doctrinal declarations of the Conference of Bishops referred to in No. 22 of the present Letter may constitute authentic magisterium and be published in the name of the Conference itself, they must be unanimously approved by the Bishops who are members, or receive the recognition of the Apostolic See if approved in plenary assembly by at least two thirds of the Bishops belonging to the Conference and having a deliberative vote." This is the only place in the law in force in which unanimity is demanded.

51. The *recognitio* will ensure that "the doctrinal response will favour communion

and not harm it, and will rather prepare an eventual intervention of the universal magisterium" (no. 22, in fine).

52. Thus the Instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* reserves to the Holy See the control of all the liturgical translations in the vernacular, which the bishops' conferences may no longer approve without Roman *recognitio*, "an exercise of the power of governance, which is absolutely necessary (in the absence of which the act of the Conference of Bishops entirely in no way attains legal force)", no. 80, AAS 95, 2001, 68.

53. According to Canon 753, the authentic magisterium is always assumed to be present in the case of a bishop who teaches on his own behalf.

54. This explains perhaps why each individual bishop is placed in a close dependence with respect to the Curia, according to the terms of the *Oath of Fidelity* in force since 1987: "Ego ... ad sedem ... promotus, catholicae Ecclesiae atque Romano Pontifici, eius supremo pastori, Christi vicario beati Petri apostoli in primatu successori et collegii Episcoporum capiti, semper fidelis ero. Libero exercitio primatialis summi Pontificis potestatis in universa Ecclesia obsequar, huiusque iura et auctoritatem mihi curae erit provehere ac defendere. Praerogativas quoque atque munera romani Pontificis Legatorum, quippe qui personam gerant supremi pastoris, agnoscam atque observabo. ... Starutis temporibus vel occasione data Apostolicae Sedi rationem de pastoralis meo officio redditam, eiusdemque mandata atque consilia simul obsequenter accipiam ac maximo studio perficiam." (I, ... having been promoted to the See of ... will always be faithful to the Catholic Church and the Roman Pontiff, her Supreme Pastor, the Vicar of Christ, the Successor of the Blessed Apostle Peter in the primacy and the Head of the College of Bishops. I will respect the free exercise of the primatial power of the Supreme Pontiff over the Universal Church, and will take care to promote and defend his rights and authority. I will also acknowledge and respect the prerogatives and duties of the Legates of the Roman Pontiff, who act in the person of the Supreme Pastor. ... At determined times or as the occasion demands, I will give an account of my pastoral office to the Apostolic See, and to the best of my ability I will obediently accept and carry out its mandates and counsels.) Quoted by Heribert Schmitz, "Professio fidei" und "iustitandum fidelitatis". Glaubensbekenntnis und Treueid. Wiederbelebung des Antimodernistendeckels?, in *Archiv für Katholische Kirchenrecht*, Katholischer Juristenverein, Paderborn, Verlag Ferdinand Schoeningh, 1988, pp. 378-379, note 93.

55. *Apóstolos suos* no. 12 with note 55: "Besides, as is clearly evident, there are many Bishops who are not heads of particular Churches, although they perform tasks proper to Bishops", AAS 90, 1998, 650. They account for as much as 43% of the episcopate, according to the data in the *Anuario Pontificio*, 17% being *emeriti*,

and many others auxiliary; many others have been ordained in an absolute manner, despite Canon 6 of Chalcedon which states that such ordinations are null.

56. Cf. The fresh work of L. Lorusso, "Il valore giuridico delle Dichiarazioni comuni tra la Chiesa cattolica e le altre Confessioni cristiane", in *O. Origini* 25, 2006/4, pp. 10-13, which poses the question as to how the increasing number of Common Declarations bind their signatories. In our opinion, statements of ecumenical intentions should be linked with a commitment to implement some concrete decisions that go in the same direction.

57. Cf. E. Corecco, "Paul VI et le statut du droit canonique", in *Paul VI et les réformes institutionnelles: Journée d'étude (Fribourg, Suisse, 9 novembre 1985)*, Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto Paolo VI, 6, Brescia 1987, pp. 13-29.

58. This is reflected in the system adopted by this Code, precisely to deal with the relationship between the Local Church and the Universal Church, which has taken up a large part of the previous analyses. This systematic implies the priority of the Local Church over that of the diocesan church, of the episcopacy of the apostolic succession over the diocesan episcopacy, and that of the Universal Church over the Local Church; cf. W.F. Rothe, "Kanonistische Anmerkungen zum Verhältnis von Universalkirche und Partikularkirche", in *Forum Katholische Theologie* 18, 2002, pp. 224-232 (who approves of these developments).

59. R. Sobanski, *Grundlagenproblematik des katholischen Kirchenrechts*, Wien-Köln-Böhlau Verlag, 1987.

60. See especially E. Corecco, *Théologie et droit canon: Écrits pour une nouvelle théologie générale du droit canonique*, Fribourg, Éditions universitaires, 1990. A. Cattaneo has undertaken the publication of the whole work, cf. *Law et communio: Scritti di Diritto canonico*, Lugano, Casale Monferrato, 1997 (2 volumes).

61. Cf. R. Metz, "Le problème d'un droit de l'Église dans les milieux catholiques, de la seconde moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle à la période post-conciliaire (1870-1983)", in *Revue de droit canonique* 35, 1985, pp. 222-244.

62. J. Hoffmann was the person who introduced the rich vein of thought of H. Dombois into France, "Grâce et institution selon Hans Dombois", in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 52, 1968, pp. 645-676, 53, 1969, pp. 41-69, and "L'horizon oecuménique de la réforme du droit canonique. A propos de deux ouvrages de H. Dombois" *Ibid.*, 57, 1973, pp. 228-250. See his programmatic article, "Statut et pratique du droit canonique dans l'Église", in *Revue de droit canonique* 27, 1977, pp. 5-37.

63. Cf. "Grundfragen einer katholischen Theologie des Kirchenrechts. Ueberlegungen zum Aufbau einer katholischen Theologie des Kirchenrechts", in *Archiv für kath. Kirchenrecht* 148, 1979, p. 341. Sound proposals to remedy this situation can be found in his most recent publication *Schriften zur Theologie des Kirchenrechts und zur Kirchenverfassung*, Paderborn, Schöningh Verlag, 2000.

64. Cf. H. Legrand, "Grâce et institution dans l'Église: les fondements théologiques du droit canonique", in *L'Église, institution et foi*, Bruxelles, Publications des Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 1979<sup>1</sup>, 1993<sup>3</sup>, pp. 139-172.

65. L. Bouyer, *L'Église de Dieu*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1970, pp. 208-209.

66. One example: quite recently a Roman theologian attempted to explain the origin of the power of the Eastern Patriarchs as follows: "It seems to be more realistic here to agree with Žužek [Reference to I. Žužek (secretary of the editorial committee of the Code of Canons of the Churches of the Eastern Rite), *Amelioraciones quaedam in decretum de Ecclesiis Orientalibus Catholicis*, Romae, 1967, p. 278] that this is neither an *explicita concessio* nor an *explicita confirmatio* by the apostolic See, but rather a recognition at least tacit of the customary rights, and next, in the final analysis, such rights have no value without the consent of the Roman Pontiff, one can say they have been 'conceded' by him", cf. *Il papa patriarca orientale? Studio storico-dottrinale*, A. Garuti, Bologna, Ed. Francescane, 1990, pp. 238-239.

67. Above all since the *Kirchenkampf* forced the Lutheran Church to discover that "it is impossible to separate the confession of faith and the external organization" (Theiss 4), in "Erklärung der DEK", in *Die Bekenntnisse und grundsätzlichen Aussagen zur Kirchenfrage: Band 1*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1935, p. 55.

68. The scheme of the church discussed during the second session, hardly mentions the work of the Holy Spirit, and many speakers underlined this deficiency. For does this not present a distorted image of the character of the church? Is not too much weight put on the external, formal shape (or nature) of the church? Is not the continuity of the church seen in the external historical form rather than the continually new work of the Spirit that was promised by Christ? Does this not almost totally exclude a growing together of the divided churches? And does this deficiency not mean that the church is understood much too much from its centre and its hierarchical constitution? Does it not fail to recognize, that the Church in the first instance is not the Universal Church but rather the communities that in all places are called together by the Holy Spirit in order to witness to their Lord?, *Reformatio*, 1964/2, p. 84.

69. Let us hope that the disappearance of the title of Patriarch of the West from the 2006 edition of the *Anuario Pontificio* is not an expression of this theology. Its significance, in fact, has still not been explained.

70. If one accepts the conclusions of the post-doctoral thesis of G. Bier, who had become ordinary professor at the university of Freiburg im Breisgau, "The general determinations of the Code concerning the issue of the episcopate and of the diocesan bishop and of the normative configuration of this ministry, describe the diocesan bishop as being judicially a functionary of the Pope (*päpstliche Beamten*)",

Georg Bier, *Die Reibstellung des Diözesanbischofs nach dem Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983, Forschungen zum Kirchenrechtswissenschaft, Bd 32, Würzburg 2001), p.376. This also results from the text of the *Ordo of Fidelity*, see note 54 above. This is what Bismark claimed after Vatican I, which the German Roman Catholic bishops refused thus receiving very hearty congratulations from Pius IX, cf. Denzinger-Hünermann, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, Herder, Freiburg im B, 1997<sup>38</sup>, nn. 3112 and 3117. According to Bier, the bishop is in a position of being a vicar-general vis-à-vis the Pope. According to Canon 480, "The Vicar general and episcopal Vicar must give a report to the diocesan Bishop concerning more important matters, both those to be attended to and those already dealt with. They are never to act against the will and mind of the diocesan Bishop." In short, it is the canonical interpretation of Vatican II, and not that of Vatican I, that has instituted the *Kaplanverantwortung* which Max Weber saw as a much more serious result than that deriving from papal infallibility. Cf. Max Weber, *Weber: political writings*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.146: "In the church the most fundamentally important outcome of 1870 was not the much discussed dogma of papal infallibility but the universal episcopate. This created bureaucratic 'rule by assistants or vicars' [*Kaplanverantwortung*], and, in contrast to the Middle Ages, made the bishop and priests into simple officials of the central power of the Curia."

71. Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, 95.

72. Cardinal J. Ratzinger, *Les principes de la théologie catholique: Esquisse et matériaux*, Paris, 1985, p.222 (Original in German, München, 1982).

73. *Decree on Eucharistism* 1.

## II. Reception: Regional and Other Perspectives

## The Effect of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* on the Church of England<sup>1</sup>

Dr Mary Tanner

It was at the Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting in Accra, Ghana, in 1974 that I first met Dr Lukas Vischer in whose honour this essay is offered. This was also my first encounter with the work of Faith and Order. It was the Accra meeting that prepared the publication of the text, *One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Regained Ministry*,<sup>2</sup> which, in time, in conversation with the churches, was to mature into the Lima document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM).<sup>3</sup> Both the work and spirit of the Accra meeting left a lasting impression on me and had a considerable influence on the direction that my own career was to take. Looking back I realize how much all of this had to do with the leadership and vision of Lukas Vischer himself. His inspiration and infectious enthusiasm for the two main programmes of the Commission which formed the focus of its work in Accra impressed me, and have stayed with me over the years. The work on sacraments and ministry on the one hand, and that on the unity of the church and the unity of mankind (human community) on the other, was a brilliant combination. In his opening address at Accra, conscious of the enormous problems and divisions of the world, Lukas Vischer called the Commission and the churches to work for church unity "with more staying power but also with wider vision".<sup>4</sup>

The breadth of Vischer's concerns for the unity of humankind did not lead him to abandon the patient, painstaking work towards theological consensus concerning central questions of faith, including the work already done in the areas of baptism, eucharist and ministry which he recognized as now needing to be carried forward. But largely due to his vision, the unity of the Church was never seen as an end in itself but potentially as "sacrament and sign" for the world of its own possibility, and as instrument in helping to bring about that unity. To quote Vischer:

The Church is a communion placed by God as a sign among men, destined to represent Christ's presence and message, constantly failing in this task and denying what the sign is meant to signify, and yet still always a sign because Christ continues to be present within it in spite of all its failures ... The ecumenical movement can, therefore, be understood as a continuing to let the sign really speak.<sup>5</sup>

It was the catholic vision held out by Vischer that in time was to echo through the Lima text.

At the end of the Accra meeting it was decided that the draft documents on baptism, eucharist and ministry should be published and sent to the churches for their response. The process of involving the churches at this early stage in the formation of statements on sacraments and ministry was a wise move for it meant that when, a decade later, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* was published, the Church of England, like many other churches, identified with the document as in some sense its own. There had been discussions of the Accra text in theological committees in diocesan synods as well as the General Synod, and Church of England theologians had been involved in the three international consultations on baptism, the ordination of women and *episkopé* and episcopacy that contributed to the development of the text. It proved easy to engage members of

the Church of England, both in denominational and ecumenical groups, in discussing the Lima Text.

These were heady days in the ecumenical movement, when things really did appear to be moving forward. There was excitement over the publication of BEM and over the many bilateral theological documents that were appearing at the same time. The publication of BEM coincided with the publication of *The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission*.<sup>6</sup> This provided a unique opportunity for the Church of England to study the two documents together. BEM, coming from the broadest existing ecumenical forum, provided an important overarching context in which to consider the substantial agreements on eucharist and ministry reached by Anglicans and Roman Catholics in their doctrinal conversation.

This helped to give confidence that agreements in the bilateral and multilateral arenas were not contradicting one another, even if the ARCIC agreements went further than those of BEM. Intensive study of both documents continued for more than six years in diocesan and deanery synods as well as in many parishes. A variety of study guides were produced including a guide for Sunday school children. Thousands of copies of a popular ecumenical guide were used in ecumenical study groups. At national level the Council of Churches sponsored a multilateral discussion of BEM while bilateral conversations took place between Anglicans and Methodists, Reformed, Baptists and members of the Society of Friends. Discussions of BEM helped the different churches to come to a greater understanding of one another, and to begin to see the applications which BEM had for deepening relations between the churches in England.

The official response of the Church of England was made by its General Synod after two major debates which were guided by the reflections of its own Faith and Order Advisory Group, which took into consideration the results of the discussions in the dioceses and deaneries.<sup>7</sup> At the end of this intensive study and debate the verdict was that members of the Church of England were able to recognize



in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* "the faith of the Church through the ages". This did not imply that every point in the document is expressed in exactly the terms Anglicans would wish to use, or that there were not areas concerning the doctrines of baptism, eucharist, and ministry that needed further reflection. Indeed, the report to the Synod drew attention to these areas. As well as affirming the theological direction of the report, the Church of England also saw that to recognize in BEM "the faith of the Church through the ages" carried with it challenges for the renewal of its own internal life, as well as for its relations with other Christian communities.

Throughout the debates an important distinction was made which was important for the future: that between the initial official response at the level of synods, and a much longer and more spiritual process of reception that must follow. This picked up the careful distinction made at the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Official response would be given in a relatively short space of time, but reception is a long-range and far-reaching process in which the whole church seeks to recognize and affirm confidently the one faith and, through the words of an ecumenical text, "freshly to lay hold of the new life which that faith promises".<sup>8</sup> The Church of England noted that:

This reception process cannot be hurried. More and more people at all levels of the church's life must be drawn into the reflective and interpretative process, so that agreements reached first by theologians, and then affirmed by synods, become part of the life of the whole people of God.<sup>9</sup>

There can be no doubt that, from the perspective of the Church of England, BEM has been a crucially important – if not the most important – ecumenical document of the ecumenical century.<sup>10</sup> BEM has had consequences not only for the internal life of the Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion. It has also contributed significantly to the establishment of new and closer relations with other churches enabling more shared service and

united mission at local, national and European levels. A document recognized by many as a convergence document expressing doctrinal convergence in matters of sacraments and ministry has proved to be more than a paper agreement. It has proved itself to be a *convergence instrument*, affecting the life and witness of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion as well as relationships with other churches.

### 1. Renewal in the life of the Church of England in response to the insights of BEM

In the article published in the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*<sup>11</sup> I traced the influence of BEM both on the renewal of the Church of England's own life and also its influence as an instrument in deepening relations with other churches. In regard to the former BEM had a notable influence on the revision of the Church of England's *liturgical texts*, not least of all on its eucharistic prayers. The effect of revision, consonant with BEM, means that whether members of the Church of England are themselves conscious of it or not, the theology of BEM (which was deemed to express "the faith of the Church through the ages") is now a part of their Christian formation through participation in the regular worship life of the Church of England.

It is, however, in the area of the threefold ministry that BEM has had the most significant influence in the Church of England. A report on the *diaconate* commissioned by the House of Bishops made extensive reference to the position of BEM, noting as important BEM's view that while no one pattern of ministry is to be found enshrined in the New Testament itself, nevertheless (because it became the generally accepted pattern early in the life of the Church, and because it is still retained by many churches today) "it may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means of achieving it".<sup>12</sup> At a time when there were senior voices in the Church of England calling for the abolishing of the diaconate,

the bishops noted that BEM upheld a threefold order while agreeing that the diaconate was in need of reform. BEM understood the interplay between service and worship as characteristic of diaconal vocation.

BEM's stance on the diaconate helped to confirm the view that if Anglicans were to commend the order there was need for a more credible expression of the diaconate. In particular the diaconal role in linking service to the world with liturgical functions should be expressed clearly.<sup>13</sup> A subsequent report of a Working Party of the House of Bishops on deacons called for a distinctive diaconate alongside the so-called "transitional diaconate".<sup>14</sup> This latest report makes extensive reference to BEM's view of the ministry of deacons, claiming that BEM marks something of a watershed in ecumenical work on the diaconate.

It is well known that the catholic and evangelical wings of the Church of England have held different understandings of the *priesthood of the ordained ministry*. BEM provided the Church of England with an incentive to seek agreement among its own people on the nature of the priesthood of the ordained ministry. In 1986 a paper on the priesthood of the ordained ministry was prepared for debate in the General Synod.<sup>15</sup> It found helpful the distinction made in BEM between the unique priesthood of Jesus Christ, the priesthood of the whole Church, and ordained ministers who "are related, as are all Christians, both to the priesthood of Christ and to the priesthood of the Church". It quoted BEM's assertion that ordained ministers

may appropriately be called priests because they fulfil a particular priestly service by strengthening and building up the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful through word and sacraments, through their prayers of intercession, and through their pastoral guidance of the community.<sup>16</sup>

The final chapter of the report set out what it called "a contemporary expression of the priesthood of the ordained ministry" which endorsed many of the insights of BEM.

A substantial report of an Archbishops' Group on the *episcopate* was published in 1990 which once more shows the influence of BEM on the Church of England's rethinking of the office and role of a bishop.<sup>17</sup> Two matters in particular proved important. The first was the way in which BEM understands the nature and functions of a pastoral leadership in "three planes" of the Church's life. The bishop has a threefold role in relation to the local community, in uniting the local church to the communion of all the churches, and the local church to the historical continuity of the apostolic church. Secondly, this report affirmed BEM's insistence that the ordained, pastoral ministry should be exercised "in a personal, collegial and communal way". This has been formative in thinking about the role of episcopal oversight in the Church of England. It has been used many times to explicate the corporate (collegial) ministry of bishops and to show how their ministry, exercised within and not above the community is, as one bishop put it, the "glue" which holds the Church together.

Paragraphs 26 and 27 of the ministry section of BEM which speak of the *personal, collegial and communal dimensions of ministry* have proved to be especially creative in helping Anglicans understand the place and role of the ordained ministry, in particular the episcopate, in sustaining the communion of the Church as bishops exercise their ministry: personally, in the college of bishops and, together with laity, in synodality focused in synods. Working with these two concise paragraphs the Church of England has been helped to understand what kind of structured life is needed to hold Christians together in a life of graced belonging as they seek to be faithful to the gospel and effective in mission. It has also helped members of the Church of England be more aware of their inter-connectedness in other provinces of the Anglican Communion and to think more about what structures of oversight – personal, collegial and communal – might hold them more effectively in an interdependent life. It has led them to talk of interdependence rather than autonomy, or more recently, "autonomy in communion".

Anglican structures at the international level include the personal ministry of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the collegial gatherings of Lambeth Conferences and meetings of the Primates, and the communal gatherings of the Anglican Consultative Council. The ministry section of BEM gives confidence to Anglicans in developing further their own structures in the light of the threefold dimension described in BEM.

Two further reports of the House of Bishops, one on *apostolicity and succession* and the other on the *collegiality of bishops*, have taken up the insights of the ministry section of BEM.<sup>18</sup> In their treatment of apostolicity the bishops quote what BEM has to say about apostolic tradition in the Church: "continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles". They found particularly helpful the distinction made between *episcopé* and episcopacy as well as the recognition that all churches have a ministry of oversight in some form, whether they have bishops or not. The bishops endorse BEM's suggestion that:

Churches which have preserved episcopal succession are asked to recognize both the apostolic content of the ordained ministry which exists in churches which have not maintained such succession and also the existence in these churches of a ministry of *episcopé* in various forms.

Churches without the episcopal succession ... are asked to realize that continuity with the Church of the apostles finds profound expression in the successive laying on of hands by bishops and that though they may not lack the continuity of the apostolic tradition, this sign will strengthen and deepen that continuity. They need to recover the sign of episcopal succession.

The bishops also welcome BEM's view that episcopal succession is not "a guarantee of the fidelity" of the Church to the teaching and mission of the apostles but rather "serves, symbolizes and guards continuity".

In the last decades the role of the House of Bishops in the Church of England has assumed greater importance in guiding the Church in matters of faith, order and moral life. As a result it became apparent that there was need to work on the theology and practice of episcopal collegiality – what it means for bishops to work together as one body, how this helps to ensure that the Church is maintained in unity and truth, and how episcopal collegiality enhances the ministry and mission of the whole body of the Church. In the course of its work on collegiality the House referred on many occasions to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. In particular the bishops took up once again the three dimensions (personal, collegial and communal) of the ministry of the Church and explored this in relation to the ministry of bishops, interpreting the structures of both the Church of England and the Anglican Communion in the light of these three dimensions.

These are just some examples to show how in reflecting on the areas of liturgy as well as the understanding of sacraments, ministry and the structures of the Church, the Church of England has in recent years turned again and again to BEM for inspiration, finding in it an incentive to renew its own thought and life. There can be no doubt that the theological and doctrinal insights of BEM are being received into the fabric of the life of the Church of England. BEM has been a force for renewal. No other ecumenical document has had such a fundamental effect on both theological understanding and renewal of life.

### III. Close relations with other churches forged on the foundation of BEM

It is, however, in the area of ecumenical relations that BEM had the most dramatic effect in the 15 years after its publication. BEM contributed significantly to the development of relationships with other churches at the local, the national and the European levels.

The failure to approve either the scheme of union between

Anglicans and Methodists or the later proposals for a Covenant between Anglicans, Methodists, Reformed and Moravians in the 1960s and 1970s led to attention in England becoming focused instead on the development of *relationships at the very local level*. Areas of Ecumenical Experiment (now known as Local Ecumenical Partnerships), were officially recognized in which churches came together to share their faith, baptism, to offer and receive eucharistic hospitality, and to share ministry but not to the extent of having an interchangeable ministry. In 1989 the Church of England looked to formalize what was happening by passing Ecumenical Canons.<sup>19</sup> These Ecumenical Canons indicate the possibilities and procedures for local initiatives, from tentative first steps taken by churches together to developed partnerships. Canon B43 allows for certain developments in ecumenical relations in any parish while Canon B44 is concerned with parishes where ecumenical commitment is to be expressed in a formal Local Ecumenical Partnership. It is doubtful whether these ecumenical Canons would have been passed without the existence of BEM, co-authored as it was by theologians from all the mainline churches in England. Extracts from BEM are appended to the Canons. It is not too much to claim that BEM provided the charter for ecumenical living at the local level.

It was not only at the local level that BEM influenced ecumenical relations in England. Immediately after its publication a series of *bilateral conversations* took place around the Lima document. Discussions of BEM with the Baptists helped Anglicans towards a more sympathetic understanding of the Baptist position over baptism, and what had hitherto been mistakenly called "re-baptism"; discussions with the Reformed helped Anglicans to recognize the ministry of oversight exercised in that tradition, while conversations with Methodists led to much greater appreciation of connexionalism. The realization of the relation between specific sacraments and the sacramental dimension of all life was a positive result of discussion of BEM with members of the Society of Friends. But perhaps the greatest influence of BEM in the eighties and

early nineties was in the *achievements of closer communion*, or even communion itself, which resulted from a number of bilateral conversations. The conversations between the Church of England and the Moravian Church led to the establishment of a new relationship on the way to visible unity.<sup>20</sup> These conversations began by comparing their several responses to BEM in order to discover whether there was sufficient agreement between the two churches to hope that a new relationship might be established. This proved an encouraging exercise, and in their preface to the Agreed Statement the Co-chairmen acknowledge the crucial theological groundwork that was laid out in BEM – "The consensus we have reached in our Conversations is based upon this groundwork."

When the Conversations came to set out ten areas of agreement in faith as a basis for entering a new and committed relationship the agreements on baptism, eucharist and ministry were couched not in Anglican or Moravian formularies but in the words of BEM. A separate chapter on the ordained ministry of the Church says that both churches find the statements concerning the threefold ministry in BEM consonant with their own understanding, and goes on to quote extensively what BEM says about each of the three orders of the ministry. The same is true in the section that looks at apostolicity and succession. Here once more the convergences of BEM provide the building blocks on which a new relationship has been established, a relationship which is developing today in committed partnership at local and national levels.

There can be little doubt about the effect that BEM has had on relations between the churches at local and national levels in England. But perhaps an even more notable effect of BEM has been on relationships between *churches at the European level*. The conversations between the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Church of England which led to the Meissen Agreement, the Conversations between the Anglican churches of Britain and Ireland and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches which led to the Porvoo Agreement, and the Conversations between the British and Irish Anglican churches and the French Lutheran and Reformed



churches establishing the Reuilly Agreement all depended heavily upon the convergences of BEM.<sup>21</sup> Each of these three agreements sets out the goal of visible unity that the churches look to live together, outlines agreements in faith they already share and on the basis of these makes firm commitments to live more closely together, sharing resources and engaging in mission and service. The relationships established by the Meissen and Reuilly agreements are significant stages on the way to visible unity.

The Porvoo relationship is one of visible unity expressed in the life of the new Porvoo Communion of churches. It is unlikely that any of these new relationships would have been established without the existence of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. BEM has contributed significantly to the changing of the ecclesial map of Europe. A new web of relationship between Christians in Europe has been created which extends across the old east-west divide. In a Europe seeking its own unity and identity these new partnerships are an important sign of the possibility of reconciled life. All the churches involved in these new partnerships are discovering ways of strengthening their relationships and intensifying shared ministry and mission. It is not an accident that in order to support these new relationships new collegial and communal structures have been established which themselves mirror the dimension of ministry described in the ministry section of BEM.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s BEM had considerable influence on the internal life of the Church of England and on its deepening relations with other traditions. The influence of BEM has continued into the new millennium. The longer process of reception of which Vancouver spoke continues. The most significant example is the use of BEM in the Common Statement from the conversations between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain.<sup>22</sup> These conversations resulted in the establishment of a new relationship of covenant between the two churches which was inaugurated in the presence of her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, in 2003. The Common Statement on which the Covenant is based follows largely the same pattern as the earlier Moravian, Baptist,

Lutheran and Reformed agreements of the 1990s, setting out as they do the goal of visible unity, the theological basis, as well as naming clearly those differences that still remain.

The agreements in faith once more depend heavily upon the words of BEM. In dealing with baptism the Common Statement refers to the fact that both churches had responded positively to BEM, pointing out that BEM's rich scriptural imagery of baptism is reflected in the liturgies of baptism of both churches. Both churches affirm the biblical basis for the meaning of baptism as that is described in BEM. Again the fact that both churches responded positively to the eucharist section of BEM as well as to the ministry section was taken as foundational for the establishment of a new and deeper relation. In the section of the Common Statement that deals with areas of convergence rather than consensus BEM's treatment of apostolic continuity, located in the faithfulness to the permanent characteristics of the Church of the Apostles rather than in any linear succession of bishops, is quoted as agreed.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time the apostolic community and the apostolic ministry go hand in hand. There cannot be an apostolic community without an apostolic ministry of the Word of God and the sacraments. When a church recognizes another church as belonging to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church it therefore recognizes the authentically apostolic nature of its ministry. "Any suggestion, therefore, that a common ministry could be created by one church bestowing on another something essential to a church, that it currently lacks, would not make sense".<sup>24</sup> BEM has led these two churches along a creative path towards the recognition of the faithfulness of each other's ministries, pointing towards eventual reconciliation of ministries. Later in the Common Statement the BEM triad "personal, collegial, communal" is used as a template to show how in both churches these three dimensions of oversight can be identified. Both churches are currently re-examining the balance between these three dimensions.

As in the earlier agreements with Moravian, Lutheran and Reformed churches BEM once more is foundational for establishing



the new and closer relationship of covenant between the Methodist Church and the Church of England – a relationship that has to be lived into. The use of BEM in each of these agreements goes a long way to providing theological consistency between them. Although there is no comparable formal agreement with the Baptist Union of Great Britain a conversation over more than a decade resulted in the publication *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*<sup>25</sup> in 2005. Once more in this conversation much common ground has been discovered through the affirmation of sections of BEM. This is most obviously so in the area of baptism.

The longer the time between Accra and Lima and today, the fewer are those – including clergy – who are able to identify what the initials “BEM” stand for, or the significance of the meetings of Faith and Order in those places. Nevertheless whether people can “identify” BEM or not, its influence continues to contribute to the shaping of the internal life of the Church of England and to undergird its relations with other churches. It is perhaps not too much to claim that no other ecumenical text has had such a formative effect on the life of the Church of England.

Looking back at Accra it is hard not to be struck by how far ahead of most of the churches the thinking of that meeting was. In addition to the work on BEM and the Account of Hope study, Accra saw the beginnings of the study on “How does the Church Teach Authoritatively Today?”. There could hardly be a subject more important for the Church of England and the Anglican Communion today, both for renewing and developing its own structures and ethos but also for developing relations with many World Communions. BEM served as an invaluable overarching text on sacraments and ministry, providing a framework in which to set any one of the bilateral agreements in the areas of sacraments and ministry. It provided a certain coherence and consistency.

What is required now is a similar detailed document on how the church might discern and teach in communion. The conspectus of studies drawn up at Accra contains suggestive directions for such a study. Work in this area was begun at Accra, but was never brought

to the stage of maturity of the work on sacraments and ministry or of that on the common confession of the apostolic faith. As churches struggle today to respond to challenges to faith and to moral life the words of Accra remain true – “we have not given sufficient attention to the various structures existing in all the churches, whereby authoritative teaching of the gospel can be given as needed in the contemporary situations and predicaments of the Church.”<sup>26</sup> Nor have we begun to envisage what structures might serve the communion of all the churches. It is greatly encouraging to see that Faith and Order now intends finally to pursue work on the nature and exercise of authority in the churches today.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of Lukas Vischer was never to lose sight of the great overall vision of the unity of the Church as sign and sacrament of the unity that God wills for all humanity. The unity of the Church *does* matter and his call to the churches to work with more staying power and wider vision remains relevant today. The Church is called to make God’s gift of unity visible and credible in a broken and divided world.

#### NOTES

1. This essay is a revised and expanded version of an earlier essay on the same subject published in *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, Bern, Stämpfli, July–September 2002, Heft 3, pp.210–224.
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3. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982.
4. *Uniting in Hope: Accra 1974: Reports and Documents from the Meeting of the Faith and Order Commission*, Faith and Order Paper No. 72, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1975, p.34.
5. *Ibid.* p.19.
6. *The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II)*, Windsor, September 1981, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.
7. London, Catholic Truth Society, 1982.

7. *Towards a Church of England Response to BEM, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (WCC) and ARCIIC, The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission*, General Synod 661, London, Church House Publishing, 1985, and *The Church of England's Response to BEM and ARCIIC, Supplementary Report*, General Synod 747, London, The Ludo Press, 1986.
8. *Gathered for Life: The Official Report of the Vancouver Assembly*, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1983, p.47.
9. *Towards a Church of England Response to BEM and ARCIIC*, p.9, §19.
10. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982.
11. See note 1 above.
12. BEM, "Ministry", §22.
13. *Deacons in the Ministry of the Church: A Report Commissioned by the House of Bishops*, General Synod 802, London, Church House Publishing, 1988, p.69ff.
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20. *The Fetter Lane Common Statement, Anglican-Moravian Conversations*, London, Council for Christian Unity, Church of England, 1996.
21. *The Meissen Agreement*, London, Council for Christian Unity, Occasional Paper 2, 1992. *Together in Mission and Ministry: The Porvoo Common Statement*, London, Church House Publishing, 1993. *Called to Witness and Service: The Revilly Common Statement*, London, Church House Publishing, 1999.
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23. *Ibid.*, §168.
24. *Ibid.*, §169.
25. *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity: Anglicans and Baptists in Conversation*, London, Church House Publishing, 2005.
26. *Commission on Faith and Order, Minutes, Acra 1974*, Faith and Order Paper No. 71, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1974, p.91.

## Memory Against Forgetting – the BEM Document After Twenty-Five Years

Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima\*

A well known novelist, Milan Kundera, wrote some years ago that "...the struggle of people against power is the struggle against forgetting".<sup>1</sup> In the context of his words we could say that after twenty-five years since the BEM document was launched by the Faith and Order Commission in 1982 in Lima, Peru, many (being far away from this event of the 1980s) have already forgotten this significant document. Others are still involved in studying or analyzing its ecumenical importance to the ecumenical movement. However many have described how we are living in a new era – which can be said not only as the time or "*kairos*" of ecclesiology but also, among other things, as the century in which the ecumenical movement is at the heart of the churches' priorities.<sup>2</sup> As the twentieth century dawned, it seemed that a number of signs were present indicating that the isolation and the sectarianism of the churches was coming to an end.<sup>3</sup> Still, few were those who at the beginning of the last century would have guessed the ecumenical advances that were to be made in the following decades. The slow and uneven progress since the divisions of the Church was to accelerate sharply. The early part of the twentieth century has often been described as the moment of birth of the ecumenical movement.

Different churches have learned – indeed had to learn – that their painful state of separation could no longer be tolerated as a natural condition, and they have been making efforts to put an end to this “human sin” in the Church.<sup>4</sup>

These efforts towards church unity have constantly grown and diversified in an impressive way during the past decades. Contrary to what many may say and assume, we are in the midst of a resurgence of concern for church unity, in that *aggiornamento* the World Council of Churches is playing a crucial role.<sup>5</sup>

The churches are more or less familiar with this development of unity discussions in the ecumenical era. After the stage of “comparative ecclesiology”, in which the positions of the confessional families were carefully set out and compared, differences registered and similarities recognized, a second stage followed which lasted for about a decade during which the churches became more dynamic in terms of mission and unity. This new phase is marked by an emphasis on the renewal and “reform” of the churches’ understanding of church unity. This includes the belief that we understand the Church, not by concentrating on a thing in itself, but by looking beyond the Church to the world which it exists to serve and to recreate.

From the beginning of the ecumenical movement, Faith and Order had envisaged working for the unity in Christ and considered it a necessary presupposition for contributing to the need for a common “witness” (*martirio*) of Christians and Christian churches. Thus the Faith and Order Movement focused its attention on the doctrinal issues of ecclesial disorder in relation to unity.

Leaving behind the hostilities of the past the churches have begun to discover many promising convergences in the ecumenical movement, in shared convictions and perspectives for the improvement of their willingness to engage in the search for church unity. These convergences assure us that, despite much diversity in theological discussion and expression, the churches have much in common in their understanding of their faith. The resultant document on “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” aimed at

becoming part of a faithful reflection of the common Christian tradition on essential elements of Christian communion, but not only. Therefore it so happens that, in the providence of God, our churches, and in particular the member churches of the World Council of Churches, are being invited to consider the Lima document, which presents a significant theological convergence which the Commission on Faith and Order was able during twenty-five years to discern and formulate.

For the first time in the history of the ecumenical movement, Faith and Order and the World Council of Churches – with and for its member churches – offered them a document and process in which – thanks to a new way of looking at the Tradition – all the results of the dialogues between the main-line churches and the churches of the Reformation, as well as of the bilateral dialogues, have been integrated.

### The ecumenical roots of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM)

To review the whole history of the BEM document – half a century of ecumenical work – in a few lines is no easy task to undertake. We can only underline the most important steps of the earlier history of this “ecumenical process”; it is essential to know about it, at least in outline, in order to grasp the significance of the Lima decision and the unique character of its statements.

#### *From Lausanne (1927) to Montreal (1963)*

By and large, the year 1920 can be regarded as the most important and decisive date of the “incarnation” of the contemporary ecumenical movement. The preliminary meeting on “Life and Work” took place in Geneva, as did the preliminary meeting for the World Conference on Faith and Order in which the Orthodox churches had been invited to participate; nearly all of

them had sent delegates,<sup>6</sup> totaling seventeen. These seventeen delegates met in private before the general meeting and decided to follow a common line; Orthodoxy was to be present as a common voice. The Metropolitan of Seleucia, Mgr Germanos, a representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, acted as their spokesman. Moreover, just before the preliminary meeting on Faith and Order, Metropolitan Germanos, accompanied by two other Orthodox delegates,<sup>7</sup> paid a brief visit to the preliminary meeting on "Life and Work" which was being held at the same time. Archbishop Nathan Söderblom from Uppsala<sup>8</sup> also played a crucial role and gave initial impetus to the movement; he had invited them in order to show the "Life and Work" delegates that the Ecumenical Patriarchate was ready to cooperate with the other churches.

From the hands of Metropolitan Germanos he received a very important document from the Orthodox Church – the encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (1920) addressed "Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere",<sup>9</sup> indicating the position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the restoration of unity between all churches and Christians:

Our own Church holds that rapprochement between the various Christian churches and fellowship between them is not excluded by the doctrinal differences which exist between them. In our opinion such a rapprochement is highly desirable and necessary. It would be useful in many ways for the real interest of each particular church and the whole Christian body, and also for the preparation and advancement of that blessed union which will be completed in the future in accordance with the will of God ... so that they (churches) should no more consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives, and as being a part of the household of God and "fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise of God in Christ" (Eph. 3:6).<sup>10</sup>

The late Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Ephesus (Myra in that time) raises the question as to why the Ecumenical Patriarchate tried to take the initiative. In his opinion the answer is the following:

Because it was once again – but more urgently and more definitely than in the past – asked to define its position against the separated Christian churches. And this position was dictated by its divine origin as a Church, by its pneumatocentric teaching, by its experience in the relations with other churches and confessions, and finally by its conscience of being an institution which should undertake pioneer work in order to define its position vis-à-vis the horrible and unacceptable fact of division.<sup>11</sup>

After the formation of the League of Nations, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople envisaged the possibility that churches could establish a similar league. This was the first initiative in the genesis of the WCC as it exists today. Therefore, this encyclical was also the first official proposal from any church for the founding – in spite of dogmatic difficulties – of a Council of Churches at a world level, with a specific programme in order to encourage the gradual realization of the ecclesial *communio*. This initiative "without precedence in the history of the Church"<sup>12</sup> greatly encouraged Archbishop Söderblom in his endeavours. For the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in general this document provided the basis for sustained cooperation by all churches with the very important ecclesiological consequence that in spite of the ecumenological self-understanding of the Orthodox churches it was addressed to "all churches of Christ". The natural result was that the Orthodox shared in the founding of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, thus preventing it from being a "pan-Protestant" movement and enabling it to be a meeting place for all Christian traditions – despite the complete absence of the Roman Catholic Church at that time.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the history of the World Council of Churches the Orthodox Church never lost sight of this principle, particularly following the Trinitarian addition to the WCC basis – which was theologically so important for the Orthodox, and which was revised at the New Delhi Assembly in 1961 in accordance with the wishes and conceptions of the Orthodox Church. Since then all the Orthodox churches have actively participated in the work of the World Council of Churches; hence the World Council is not anything alien to Orthodoxy, but can be seen as its own organization;<sup>14</sup> Orthodoxy has been a voice from within the Council, deeply committed to the continuation of its work without losing sight of its real aim: to achieve full communion of the churches on the basis of true belief and love.

I have mentioned all these events in the 1920s because I am convinced that these dates marked a very important step, beginning with the initiative of the Orthodox Church towards an ecumenism which was to find its achievement later in the genesis of the Lima document.

It is now more than fifty years since in Lausanne, in 1927, the first steps were taken towards discussing a subject which should be of interest to the whole of Christianity. After centuries of separation and dire estrangement, the attempt was now to be made to mend the torn robe of Jesus Christ in order that the divided members of his mystical Body, the Church, might again be bound together. Therefore at its First World Conference, Faith and Order was entrusted with the question of sacramental unity (Baptism and Eucharist) and also the questions relating to the ministries of the Church. However, the results achieved in Lausanne fell far short of the high-flown expectations.

From the present vantage point the surprising factor is not that agreement proved impossible right away at this first ecumenical conference, but rather that people had the courage at that time to tackle, at one and the same time, these and other central ecumenical questions which still preoccupy us today. After Lausanne, there was hardly any major Commission meeting at which these three issues

did not play a significant role and were further illuminated by ecumenical experiences.

At the Third World Conference on Faith and Order, in Lund in 1952, it was realized that no progress towards unity would be achieved by a comparative method alone. The Conference looked for progress in two directions. It affirmed the need for the churches to act together in those matters where deep differences of conviction did not compel them to act separately (the "Lund principle"; i.e. ecumenism is not simply concerned with doctrine, but also with living, worshipping and acting). It also recommended that in the future the doctrine of the Church should be studied "in close relation both to the doctrine of Christ and to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit". The full Trinitarian thrust became clear at the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order held at Montreal in 1963. In the doctrine of the Holy Trinity the Church expresses its faith that unity in diversity is at the heart of God himself.

Faith and Order began to spend less time comparing the "branches of the tree" and more time exploring the "common trunk" and the roots – exploring what Scripture and Tradition have said about ministry, sacraments and the nature of the Church. The old dichotomy between Scripture and Tradition was left behind: "By the *Tradition* is meant the Gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the Church, Christ himself present in the life of the Church. By *tradition* is also meant the traditional process".<sup>15</sup>

#### *From Bristol (1967) to Lima (1982)*

In 1965, the Faith and Order Commission began to elaborate the theme of the Holy Eucharist, and two years later, in 1967, a first draft document was presented to the Bristol Commission meeting. In Bristol it was proposed that the earlier study on the eucharist be enlarged to include concerns of baptism and confirmation as well and, in 1971, concerns of the "ordained ministry" were added. The whole "pre-process" work found its interim form in the three agreed



statements. "One. Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry" (Accra, 1974).

In 1975, the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi expressed its appreciation of these convergent statements and recommended that the Accra document be sent to all member churches for study and comment. This first round of "reception" of the Accra texts took place during the years 1976 and 1978. The response was overwhelming: more than one hundred responses reached the Secretariat on Faith and Order from all parts of the world. Therefore, a small theological steering committee, under the leadership of Frère Max Thurian, was established – with a very important and significant Orthodox participation. The results of four years' work of this committee constituted the basis of the concluding discussion at the Lima Commission meeting in 1982.

### *Lima (1982)...*

This ecumenical document – the result of more than half a century of study and dialogue – found its culmination in Lima (Peru) when over 100 theologians from all over the world met and unanimously approved the "maturity" of "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" proceeding from the Accra Commission meeting (1974). Theologians from all major church traditions were represented in Lima – Roman Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, and others.

In the course of the Lima meeting 190 proposed alterations of the text were considered. On 12 January, the following motion was put before the Commission:

The Commission considers the revised text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry to have been brought to such a stage of maturity that it is now ready for transmission to the churches in accordance with the mandate given at the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi, 1975, and reaffirmed by the Central Committee in Dresden, 1981.<sup>16</sup>

The vote was taken on the document as a whole, not on each section. The motion passed unanimously, without negative votes or abstentions.

Finally at the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1983) the importance of the spiritual process of the BEM reception was emphasized and the churches were encouraged to submit their official response by 31 December 1985. The following years the Commission began to receive the official responses to the BEM document, which were then published in six volumes.<sup>17</sup>

### *The ecumenical significance of BEM after twenty-five years*

Today after twenty-five years we still live at a significant moment in the history of the ecumenical movement, as churches grow in unity and question their own ecclesiological understanding and practice of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry in relation to their mission in and for the renewal of the human community, seeking to promote justice, peace and reconciliation to the world. Thus, our understanding of BEM cannot be divorced from the redemptive and liberating mission of Christ through the churches in the modern world.

It also needs to be said that the World Council of Churches never expected each church to adopt the language of the BEM document as *official dogma*; and yet, something much more significant than another round of theological exchange is now called for and envisaged. Various theologians have said in effect that there is no good reason why we cannot put behind us the historic disputes over the sacraments and ministry – they have reached a "convergence". The reception process will obviously be far from easy!

Therefore, BEM was not an isolated event – nor was it produced only for the "academic pleasure", benefit and "profit" of theologians. It was one of the essential marks of unity as conciliar fellowship

which the Nairobi Assembly in 1975 identified as the goal of the ecumenical movement.

Speaking as a convergence statement, the Lima document was more humble, more anticipatory. BEM was not a negative judgment – only a realistic one. It reminded the churches of the fact that the ecumenical pilgrimage had not yet reached its goal and that the measure of unity, which can be expressed now, by far exceeds the timidity of our dialogues and conferences. Quite rightly, this document was not described as a consensus document or a consensus statement, but as a document containing statements of convergence, since consensus in the sense of the word was not reached on the themes discussed – as has been pointed out several times in the document. In the nature of things, this created additional difficulties with regard to its reception and the type of reception aimed at. Hence, one comment made in the preface is misleading, namely “that theologians of such widely differing traditions should have been able to speak so harmoniously about baptism, eucharist and ministry is unprecedented in the modern ecumenical movement”.<sup>18</sup> This sounds as if the document has been adopted, in its present form, as a consensus statement.

It is, of course, an achievement that the document *was* adopted, even though in its present form it is not a consensus document. That theologians from different traditions also traditionally holding differing views were able to concur in one and the same document and to reach a certain degree of harmony or even conformity is a sign of qualification. This is already a great step forward. Lukas Vischer used a somewhat more cautious wording in the preface to the Asen document: “That theologians of such widely differing traditions should be able to speak so unanimously about baptism, eucharist and ministry is not something to be taken as a matter of course”.<sup>19</sup> The debt of the Lima document to the text just mentioned is obvious.

While the core, or nucleus, of this text reflects the ecumenical work up to the 1980s, it also illustrates a new way of approaching the centuries-old debate on these three issues among the Christian

confessions and denominations. And this convergence document, as a result of genuine ecumenical dialogue within the fellowship of Christian churches and in mutual appreciation of one another's tradition and charismatic life, presents the converging lines of the faith of the divided churches on baptism, eucharist and ministry.

Only this can explain the reason the separated church confessions – from the extreme Catholic to the extreme Protestant – could then together, and in full agreement, state items of faith on baptism, eucharist and ministry which seemed impossible even a few years earlier. This was the “new understanding” of “consensus” in a positive sense, i.e. confirming in common our basic elements of faith.

The document is also of special significance because of the methodology that was used to bring it about. Until the 1950s, Faith and Order frequently was a place where Protestant churches compared their conceptions of doctrinal questions (Augsburg vs. Westminster vs. the Thirty-Nine Articles), but after Lund (1952) the work took a decisive turn. Faith and Order began to explore what Scripture and church Tradition had to say. The tradition of the gospel, the *paradosis* of the *kerygma*, the faith of the Apostolic Church, testified in the Scripture and transmitted as a living reality through the ages, is what the churches had asked their theologians in Faith and Order to explore and express – and this they then claimed to have done with regard to baptism, eucharist and ministry.

After Lima many ecumenical bodies and organizations held consultations and meetings in order to strengthen the importance of the document and to emphasize its ecumenical significance within their search for church unity.<sup>20</sup> However, though it is a major event in the process towards visible unity – and for this reason one understands why it has been welcomed in ecumenical circles and by the international press with such enthusiasm – we must nevertheless guard ourselves against any kind of triumphalism and self-justification.

### The situation in the 1980s

The Lima event of 1982 and the document on baptism, eucharist and ministry have caused considerable turmoil in the life of all our churches, including the Orthodox churches, and in their theological concerns. But why has this happened? As one scientist has said: The important thing in research is to state the problem properly. The answer to this question is in fact very simple and it is of some significance for the whole history of the ecumenical movement because, for the first time in that history, WCC member churches were faced with the delicate and difficult question of how far they are able to "receive" a document which does not emanate from their own church tradition. In other words, they were confronted with the problem of the *reception* of the Lima document.

This theological imbroglio caused by this new phenomenon has been dominating the life of our churches for the past decades. It must be said, however, that a considerable number of churches have given quite a positive response – though they have not been sparing in their criticisms, or have even in some cases indulged in an excess of triumphalism. Still others continued to regard the document with an "enigmatic theological suspicion"; Orthodox churches probably fall into the latter category.

Whereas in some European churches, for instance in Germany and Great Britain, or also in the United States, BEM not only became part of daily life but also figured in the theological education programmes and on the curriculum of the faculties and ecumenical institutes of these countries, in the Orthodox world the document was largely placed as *terra incognita* or *mysterium*, something which is not to be touched, or at best a matter for specialists.

It has also become clear that – although BEM has been translated into many non-European languages and is considered the first ecumenical document with a large distribution and publication round the world, having penetrated to all the corners of the world –

in spite of its geographical distribution and translation, BEM has remained a concern of *first world* theologians.

Let us return to the present situation in the Orthodox world. This is entirely understandable, for BEM and its reception pose, and will continue to pose, a great dilemma for our churches – as indeed they do for other churches, too. The fact is that, despite the theological convergences contained in the Lima texts, the Orthodox churches will never be able to accept them in their entirety. This view is shared by many Orthodox theologians who were involved in one way or another in the work on BEM before or after 1982. On the one hand, there is no need for our churches to fear the text, or to decline to have anything to do with it. The role that the Orthodox churches played in relation to BEM following its publication was significant, as they emphasized the importance of the document as an instrument which should be used by the churches in discussing the unity of the Church in diversity. It was also clear that the document was very little used or referred to by them in the bilateral theological dialogues. This attitude of the Orthodox towards BEM is the result of their "reception" process, in which the reception of BEM did not come to fruition in their ecclesial life. On the one hand they much appreciated the importance of the document, and on the other hand have taken distance from it. The same effect was realized with their responses to the document: the majority of the Orthodox churches expressed themselves positively towards the text – while of course raising fundamental ecclesiological questions about it – but never affirmed that it will be included in their teaching of church tradition.

Moreover, the Orthodox Church is one of the churches which sowed the seeds from which ecumenism was born. If it were now to become a fierce opponent of BEM, it could very well destroy the whole future of theological ecumenism. As we all know, the BEM text is not an Orthodox, nor a Catholic, nor a Protestant document, and no confession can recognize itself in it completely. Nor can we simply judge the document in terms of our particular confessional vocabulary and schemes of thought, for to do so would inevitably

mean to misjudge it. John Gartshore, a churchman who takes a very critical stand on BEM, affirmed that "...no one church is going to find in it an exact description of its beliefs and practices; on the other hand few churches are likely to reject it out of hand saying 'our beliefs and practices cannot be accommodated by this statement'...." <sup>21</sup>

## BEM and ecclesiology

BEM is a convergence text in which the different communities, though still separated, can recognize themselves as part of the apostolic faith. In studying BEM after twenty-five years we can trace the line of development starting from mutual recognition between the churches; moving through spiritual emulation and fruitful confrontation in the quest for, and defence of, the truth as experienced by each of them separately; and arriving at the present period of theological consensus. The theological consensus which BEM represents reflects the present state of the conciliar ecclesial community as it moves towards visible unity of the Church, echoing this on the theological level. Without trying to be a new "confession" or claiming to take the place of existing ecclesiologies, nor to be a full dogmatic exposition of a doctrine on baptism, eucharist and ministry, the consensus document nevertheless summarizes what the churches can at least confess together, recognizing that they share the common tradition of the gospel. It does so using a method which springs from the experience within that conciliar community and which is therefore positive, reconciliatory and comprehensive in its approach. The ecclesiology underlying BEM thus applies the formula of Montreuil (1965) according to which we live in the tradition of the gospel, the one source of life in the Church which binds Scripture and Tradition inseparably together.

What ecclesiology is BEM based on? It is difficult to take this question very far. This is why BEM is based on an apparently

catholicizing ecclesiology, in the theological sense of the term, and this why this underlying tendency is implicitly present (though not explicitly defined in scholastic terms) at the origin of all the different aspects of BEM. The Church is conceived as the ecclesial communion (*koinonia*), based on biblical images and in a charismatic, eucharistic, prophetic and eschatological perspective. <sup>22</sup>

Sacramental life and the Word are the fruits, the expression, and the result of its ecclesial community and at the same time they are its essential constitutive elements. Without the ecclesial prerequisites there are no sacraments; without the life of the sacraments and the prophetic Word there is no Church.

In all of this we find the elements of the Church's life, proclamation, mission, worship, eschatological vision, presence in the world – sacraments and prophecy, confession and diakonia. The Church is the community of the New Covenant between God and his people (*laos tou Theou*); <sup>23</sup> at the same time, it is the body of Christ and the people of God, that is, a community made up of those who are baptized in the name of the Trinity; <sup>24</sup> it is communion with God, <sup>25</sup> being itself called to proclaim and prefigure the kingdom of God by announcing the gospel to the world and by its very existence as the body of Christ, and to bring a foretaste of the joy and glory of God's kingdom. <sup>26</sup> The Church receives this foretaste through the Holy Spirit in the eucharist; <sup>27</sup> the life of the new creation so that it may present to the world the image of a new humanity. <sup>28</sup> Christ is always the source of its mission and the foundation of its unity. <sup>29</sup> However, the ecclesiology which underlies BEM is at the same time the basis of the consensus, in that it affirms that the apostolic tradition of the gospel inevitably precedes any particular reflection on the texts.

Besides, this is the only possible vision for BEM – an ecclesial community, with a Trinitarian, Christocentric and strongly pneumatological basis which is evident in its liturgical life and in its evangelical and missionary action in and for the world (*cosmos*) and in its emphasis on doxology and eschatology.

The consensus cannot be shaken by any discussions within the

ecclesiological phenomenon of BEM. Indeed, if they are conducted in the interests of the community of consensus, they may well prove to be both important and fruitful. This can be illustrated by the difficulties the texts have in relation to certain traditional doctrines which continue to divide the confessions, and demand a new approach if we are to reach a new consensus in the future. As affirmed in the preface of BEM, consensus is understood as "that experience of life and articulation of faith necessary to realize and maintain the Church's visible unity".<sup>30</sup>

### Reception, response or rejection?

It is quite clear, and this is very important to note, that there has been a misunderstanding in many churches as to the meaning of "reception", and particularly reception of the Lima document. The Orthodox Church is among those in this uncomfortable position. There are many different voices to be heard in the Orthodox world as to how the reception of BEM is to be understood. Theological opinion varies widely. This, in my view, is not entirely the fault of certain churches and it would have been advisable, before the publication of the Lima texts, to study and clarify the *notion* of reception as it applies to an ecumenical document such as BEM. An introduction of the type contained in BEM was certainly not enough to dispel the ambiguous attitudes of the churches in relation to this burning but very significant issue.

Each church, and particularly the Orthodox Church, has a different conception of what reception means according to its tradition. There can be no question of using the term "reception" in relation to BEM in the same sense as the reception of the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils and Synods in the early centuries of the Church's history. Indeed this is not what the WCC is asking for. We are dealing here with an entirely new and different form of reception – the "ecumenical reception", if one may put it that way, of a convergence document which does not belong to any one tradition.

This calls for "theological" reflection by all church members and, above all, for the celebration of the common faith. The very well-known late Orthodox theologian Fr Ion Bria affirmed that "...for the Orthodox themselves the reception of BEM is a tremendous opportunity to rediscover the essence of Orthodoxy",<sup>31</sup> not in a confessional sense, but as the common tradition in which all the churches meet and which is the basis for their historical responses and their practical witness.

### Reception in its classical form

Reception is also part of the ongoing life of the Church. Ever since the time of our Lord and the Apostles, the Church constantly *sends* and *re-receives* the message of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, we can go even further back and make the point that *our Lord himself* received not only vertically (*kathélos*) the mission from his Father, but also horizontally (*orizontalos*) the history of the people of Israel to which he belonged as Man.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the idea of reception precedes the Church itself and it must be underlined that in a very deep sense the Church *was* born out of an ongoing process of reception; the Church itself is a product of reception. But in spite of this general sense of reception – which we must always bear in mind – the term, in the course of history, acquired a very specific and technical sense. This sense is mainly associated with the *Councils* of the Church and with the *decision-making* of the Fathers. It entered even into the terminology of canon law and acquired there a special meaning: it is the acceptance and consent given by the people to a particular conciliar or ecclesiastical decision. In the present times the conception and the idea of reception become a basic theological *concept* in the ecumenical context.

It is also important to understand that the "reception" of the Lima document is not already the "end" (*telos*) of the ecumenical pilgrimage towards a true and full communion of the Christian families. BEM is intended to initiate a new dynamism. It does this



by being a *sign*, which stands at the main crossroads of the ecumenical task and this sign—visible from everywhere—is such that there will be no escaping from it. As Jean Tillard affirmed, "...everybody who seriously comes and works for the ecumenical movement has to look upon this theological convergence as a 'way ahead' of God's people."<sup>33</sup>

A significant difficulty is also the last part of the document, which raises quite an important point: the problem of language, which does not exactly facilitate reception, will have to be tackled. We fully realize that this is not an easy problem, and we also know that the Faith and Order Commission is aware of it. Indeed, the preface indicates that the language of the text is not the language of today and that the document "will likely stimulate many reformulations of the text into the varied languages of our time."<sup>34</sup> But the language problem arises not only in terms of past and present, but also between the different forms of expression used in addressing theological-eclesial themes within the churches today.

For example, in the Greek translation of the document a term is chosen in the title itself which—according to my view—does not properly reflect the intention of the convergence statements on "Ministry", and would certainly not bring forward an immediately favourable reaction among many of our Protestant brethren. The term "ministry" (*Ami*, in the German equivalent of "office") is here rendered by the Greek word *hierosyne*. There are, of course, words in the Greek language corresponding to "ministry" (again, *Ami* = office): *leitourgema*, *ypereia*, etc. But when one of these terms is used, it bears no theological-eclesial relation to what is meant in the document. If *hierosyne* is used, however, only one aspect of "ministry" is covered, an aspect that is certainly referred to in the document but not only in the title or the chapter on the subject, namely the ordained priestly ministry. The term "ministry" (*Ami* for "office") suggests something much broader, more diverse and even ambiguous. Professor Konidaris translated "ministry—office" (*Ami*), for example, as *leitourgema* followed in brackets by *hierosyne*.<sup>35</sup> And when writing in his study in Greek about *hierosyne* in relation

to the Lima document, he uses "priestly ministry—priestly office" in brackets.<sup>36</sup>

I have given this striking example in order to show that the theological-eclesiological background of each church plays a major role, which must not be overlooked in relation to reception. It is precisely for this reason that the convergence document represents a stimulus and a challenge to sustained work on the language and the historical background of the language, on the thought forms and also the non-theological and non-eclesial factors in the different churches. This is necessary so that we can better understand our Christian brethren, either by retaining differences of language where it is clear that the same thing is meant, or by means of a new language expressing what has been jointly worked out and understood, even if this involves an unfamiliar terminology.

### Response

A first major step proposed in Vancouver 1983 was an evaluation of the doctrinal results achieved through the reception process of BEM by the churches. Thus we read in the Report from the WCC Vancouver Assembly:

...It is also important to distinguish the "process of reception" and the "official response". The "official response", which is requested at a relatively early date, is intended to initiate a process of study and communication in which each church will attempt to provide an answer to the four preface questions, answers which are not simply the response of individuals or groups within the church but which, in some sense, understood by the church itself, are given on behalf of the church. This "official response" is explicitly not understood to be the church's ultimate decisions about Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry", but rather the initial step in a longer process of reception. This "process

of reception" is something which each church will have to understand in terms of its own tradition...<sup>37</sup>

By way of concrete illustration we take this example from the Lutheran theologian and former Director of the Faith and Order Commission, William Lazareth, who used to affirm categorically that:

...it means that you do not go home and measure Lima in terms of the Council of Trent or the Augsburg Confession or the Thirty-Nine Articles. We are reversing the order and asking, "How do you validate your communion's articulation of its faith in light of the tradition (paradosis) of the kerygma, the holy Tradition of the Gospel?" So, for example, if there is any incompatibility between BEM and the fifth article of the Augsburg Confession on "the Ministry", it may be so much the worse for the Augsburg Confession.<sup>38</sup>

Several responses to BEM showed that some of the churches could distinguish between what is meant by an initial *response*, to be given before the end of 1985, and a *reception* of the document, which will take longer.<sup>39</sup>

### *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: the text demands discernment and humility...*

As we mentioned, this document is the outcome of long years of devoted work by many people. It has been prepared and drafted by theologians from various WCC member churches, and from some non-member churches as well. Should certain churches, and I think in particular of the Orthodox Church, decide to reject the document outright and adopt a totally negative position, without making a critical analysis of the whole text and considering what purpose it might serve for others, the whole Orthodox contribution to the ecumenical movement would be endangered. For this reason the document could serve as a good theological instrument which is

helpful not only for others but, also to some extent, for Orthodoxy itself. As also noted above, Orthodox participation in the emergence of BEM has been considerable from the outset, and on more than one occasion eminent Orthodox theologians have contributed significantly to the BEM process. The Orthodox have thus not only been present, but have also made a deep theological contribution. Among the many aspects of BEM which have benefited from Orthodox theology, and which bear the "mark" of Orthodoxy, the following may be mentioned.

On the question of Scripture and Tradition, BEM was helped by the presence of the Orthodox who were able to make their theological position understood effectively. As regards the relationship to Scripture, Orthodox theologians have always taken the biblical texts seriously, though not slipping into a simplistic Biblicism,<sup>40</sup> and see the sacraments as being essentially instituted by the words of Christ himself: the commission to baptize as contained in the Gospel of Matthew (28:18-20), the accounts in the synoptic gospels of the paschal eucharist of Christ, and the tradition reported by Paul (1 Cor. 11:23-26) on the subject of the ordained ministry. They have fought to have the tradition of the laying on of hands with the invocation of the Holy Spirit, as attested to in the letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6), recognized by others as apostolic, fundamental and necessary.

Another instance of Orthodox participation in BEM was their insistence that the great Tradition of the early centuries of the Church, the patristic, liturgical and Conciliar Tradition, be duly considered. I have mentioned only a small sample of the Orthodox theological contributions but in all the "shining stones" which make up the inter-confessional "mosaic" of the different traditions represented in BEM, there is a clear return to the apostolic and patristic Tradition which is due also to the Orthodox contribution. Therefore some Protestants even accused BEM of being too Orthodox, but this was a completely false assessment. BEM was a document of the whole ecumenical movement.<sup>41</sup>

BEM after twenty-five years needs to be considered and studied with discernment and humility. A century of history cannot be wiped out and denied by a decision taken, perhaps, without thought to its future consequences. Orthodoxy is well placed to help with BEM and to use it more fully as an instrument for ecumenical dialogue.<sup>42</sup> Through engaging with the texts and the commentaries (which admittedly sometimes seem to make the text complicated), and the language (which may not be easy and familiar to everybody), cannot Orthodoxy put over its message to others? The difficulty in speaking about reception in connection with the Faith and Order Commission's statements was made clear by the Roman Catholic Professor Peter Neuner, when he said:

...there is great perplexity on all sides as to how reception is possible or what it signifies. This applies also to the Lima paper of the WCC. Here the difficulties were perhaps even greater than with other comparable texts because the literary form and style of this document is far from being uniform.<sup>43</sup>

BEM was a crossroads of theological convergence, where the Orthodox churches were trying to harmonize the process leading to the visible unity of the Church. Finally it must be said that while the Orthodox may not "expect much" of BEM, it is nevertheless true that there could be no BEM document without Orthodoxy.

BEM has not been concluded. Lima marked not the goal, but the beginning of a long and even more difficult road. BEM still has a long way to go towards a future theological consensus. However, the reception process will continue to confirm the fact that the WCC member churches are at a stage of convergence which goes beyond the stage of bilateral theological dialogue. It is understandable that there are some frustrations, certain limits at every stage along the way to visible unity – but there is also a certain amount of freedom.

The important thing is to keep an adequate dialogue going at every stage. The churches of the West, Catholic and Protestant,

defined their faith and doctrine without dialogue with the East, sometimes in a climate of schism and polemic. Nowadays all the churches must reject this non-dialogical attitude inherited from the hostilities of the past. This is why Orthodoxy never said "yes" or "no" to BEM, or to this or that section of BEM, but at the appropriate time prepared a series of theological *desiderata* which were raised some years later with the World Council of Churches through the establishment of the Special Commission, in order that the Orthodox could continue their dialogue and participation. The problems emanating from BEM could then be treated in a different perspective. We very much hope that in the experience of the reception process all the churches will be able to build one another up and better understand one another, to their mutual enrichment. But this does not automatically guarantee that the reception process will not develop a negative dynamic, and it will be for all of us to safeguard against that.

A last and very important point should also be stated: BEM was not isolated from the other theological study projects being dealt with at that time by the Faith and Order Commission. The studies "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today" and "The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community" were closely related to each other. BEM, apostolic faith, and unity and renewal – all three were asked to give mutual theological support and serious reflection, and BEM could not have existed without the other two studies.

Through the Lima texts Christians could, as it were, discover the essential things that *unite* them at this stage of the ecumenical movement and which should also make them *one* because the future of humankind depends on the restoration of Christian unity and the reconciliation between Christians.<sup>44</sup> But, as one spiritual father has said, "...wherever there is human will, the grace and blessing of God are manifest". Some years ago a very well-known Greek theologian, Christos Yannaras,<sup>45</sup> affirmed that "...as a traditionalist Orthodox believer, it often strikes me that we Orthodox enter into ecumenical dialogue with a rather jaundiced view of our positions".

In his article – which did little to gain him warm friends among his contemporary colleagues in Greek Orthodox theological circles – he pointed out that the Orthodox too often react to Western theological affirmations with a sense of “inferiority” about the Eastern Christian theological scheme, leading to self-denigration and an almost obsequious attention to sometimes-unwarranted Western criticism of Orthodox theological traditions. The end result of this is that our theologians end up at times not being “position takers” but rather “position defenders”. The consequent loss to the Orthodox witness is one of precision and a careful exposition of the unique Orthodox view. Simultaneously, an atmosphere of vulnerability is created among Orthodox thinkers that would lead even the most benign observer to wonder just what the late, great Orthodox theologian Father Georges Florovsky<sup>6</sup> meant when he envisioned the role of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement as that of the standard of Christianity, reaching out beyond its own perimeters to touch the other Christian churches. Such a vision is greatly compromised by self-criticism that borders on self-abnegation. Not a little of this can be seen in certain of the Orthodox approaches to BEM.

Orthodox theology has always underlined in the ecumenical movement the principle of communion – *koinonia* which is an echo of the link Orthodox makes between the *koinonia* of the Holy Trinity and the ecclesial life. The Trinitarian understanding of God is the basis for Christian life. Therefore, the Orthodox cannot understand personal faith outside the faith of the community. The essence of God's economy of salvation is the life that streams forth, the source of the all-life-giving Trinity, and proceeds into, and now abides with, all things.

Eastern theology believes in a unity which springs from the heart, mind and purpose of God. The unity sought is a unity within God, a unity which God possesses in himself and offers to us in his Son. God is unity; and in the incarnation, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ there is unity with him. This is a unity of a special nature, sacramental in essence, which is experienced by the disciples

and the apostolic community, by all members of the Church, when – and to the extent that – it is shared with the world. It is one organic process involving humanity and creation as a whole, rather than individuals for their own sake.

The Orthodox also closely link the universality of the Church with the image of Christ as *Pantokrator*, the one who brings exaltology and glorification – *basileia* – into history. Christ as *Pantokrator* has absolute rule over the creation, bringing under his own power all things, which mysteriously show forth his brightness and majesty: the risen Christ, the glorious Kyrios. Love itself unites and binds together all things in a mutual communion.

Ecclesiology has been a very controversial subject in all ecumenical discussions. It is widely agreed that past ecclesiologies have made it difficult for Christians to understand not only such internal issues as the relationship between state and church, or the role of lay people, but also the wider ecumenical community. To put the point sharply, the critical problem is *the very relevance of ecclesiology itself*. Ecclesiology should help people to understand the meaning of religion, humanity, salvation, culture and values – issues in which the traditional language of the church has become quite often largely irrelevant. We need to build a conciliar Church, a fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This will include both people who have died for their faith and thus contributed a deep sense of certainty, but also those who bring openness and a sense of humility. BEM will continue for years to come to be the unique ecumenical document of reference in relation to the search for Church unity.

#### NOTES

<sup>6</sup> The first version of this article was published as “The Physiognomy of BEM after Lima in the Present Ecumenical Situation”, in *Orthodox Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ed. by Gennadios Limouris and Nomikos Michael Vaportis, Faith and Order Paper No. 128, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, MA, 1983, pp. 25–45.



1. Cf. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, New York, A. A. Knopf, 1980.
2. Cf. Otto Dibelius, *Das Jahrhundert der Kirche: Geschichte, Berechnung, Unsinn und Ziele*, Berlin, Furche-Verlag, 1927; See also J.R. Nelson and K.D. Schmidt, "Die Kirche bildet eines der Hauptanliegen der Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts", in T. Rendtorff, *Kirche und Theologie: Die systematische Funktion des Kirchenbegriffs in der neueren Theologie*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohr, 1966, p.11; Cf. Ioannis Karmiris, *Orthodox Ecclesiology*, Athens, 1973, vol. 5, p.7 (in Greek).
3. Cf. W.G. Rusch, *Ecumenism: A Movement Towards Church Unity*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985, p.26.
4. Cf. Gennadios Limouris (now Metropolitan of Sassima), "The physiognomy of BEM after Lima in the present ecumenical situation", in *Orthodox Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ed. by Gennadios Limouris and Nomikos Michael Vaporiis, Faith and Order Paper No. 128, Brookline, MA, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1985, p.25.
5. Cf. *Church, Kingdom, World: The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign*, ed. by Gennadios Limouris, Faith and Order Paper No. 130, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1986.
6. The Russian Orthodox Church could not be represented, but church leaders from the Russian emigration were present.
7. The two other members of the Orthodox delegation were: Metropolitan of Nubia Nikolaos and Archimandrite Dr Chrysostomos Papadopoulos (later Archbishop of Athens, 1923-1941).
8. See also B. Sundkler, *Nathan Söderblom: His Life and Work*, Lund, Gleerups, 1968, pp.379-380.
9. The encyclical had been prepared between 10 January and 19 November 1919 by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and it was sent out in January 1920. See the text (translated from Greek) in *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 12, 1959, p.79.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Ephesus (Metropolitan of Myra of that time, Konstantinidhis (+)), "La position de l'Orthodoxie dans le monde chrétien actuel", in *Istina*, vol. 30, 1985, no. 2, Paris, Centre d'Etudes Istina, pp.191-202 (paper delivered in Athens on 21 February, 1985); See also *Episkopos* no. 331 (January 3, 1985), p.18 (in French).
12. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982, p.1.
13. "Die 'Predebrene' vor Gericht. Zum Streit um das 'politische' Engagement des ÖRK", A. Papaderos, in *Ökumenische Rundschau*, vol. 30, 1981, pp.408-425.
14. Cf. The encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the occasion of the

twenty-fifth anniversary of the World Council and the message from the Moscow Patriarchate.

15. "Scripture, Tradition and Traditions", in *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order: Montreal 1963: the Report*, ed. by P.C. Rodger and L. Vischer, Faith and Order Paper No. 42, London, SCM/Press, 1964, pp.50-61.

16. Cf. *Towards Visible Unity. Commission on Faith and Order, Lima 1982*, vol. I, ed. by Michael Kinnamon, Faith and Order Paper No. 112, Geneva 1982, pp.83-84.

17. *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vols. I-VI, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Papers No. 129, 132, 135, 137, 143, 144 respectively, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1986-1988.

18. BEM, "Preface", p.ix.

19. *One Baptism, one Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry: Three Agreed Statements*, Faith and Order Paper No. 73, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1973, p.6.

20. One of the ecumenical bodies that dealt primarily with BEM was the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The European churches, and in particular CEC, bear a major responsibility for the development of the Christian Tradition over the centuries, and also for the divisions which have separated Christians into different confessions or communions. Therefore, CEC – in close cooperation with the Faith and Order Commission – drew up a programme of four regional consultations looking particularly at the European discussion of BEM and its "reception". The aim of CEC in this was not to substitute itself for its member churches with a view to providing a global response to BEM in their place, but to take the opportunity of examining certain factors that may contribute to the reception of BEM by the European churches – since the two main directions of the work of CEC are service to peace and service to ecumenism in Europe.

a) The first consultation held in Bucharest, Romania, 25-27 June, 1984, focused upon "The influence of European philosophy and ways of thought (*Gesamtschichte*) on the reception of BEM in the different church traditions". It pointed out that some Christian divisions in Europe had in fact been the result of a false dualism between matter and spirit. As a result of this dualism there had been a tendency towards polarization between those who were affected by rationalism (for example, regarding the eucharist as a mere memorial of a past event), and those who were affected by excessive realism (for example, regarding the eucharistic elements as not losing their former mode of existence as bread and wine). BEM had overcome this dualism by a properly biblical understanding of the relationship of spirit and matter, whereby the Holy Spirit in Christ sanctified the human being as a whole.

European culture had also been excessively influenced by individualization



and privatization. BEM restored a proper degree of catholicity and the universal impact of baptism, eucharist and ministry.

b) The second consultation held at Iserlohn, Federal Republic of Germany, 10-14 December, 1984, had as its theme "The influence of confessional and church self-understanding on the reception of BEM and the consequences of such reception". The papers presented and the reports of the three sections of the consultation showed that confessional self-understanding can exert influence on the reception of BEM in two different ways:

1) If confessional self-understanding remains enclosed in itself and fails to take into account the apostolic faith in all its fullness, then the BEM reception process will be transformed into a process which merely hardens previous confessional attitudes.

2) But if confessional self-understanding remains open to the whole of the apostolic faith, to which the Scriptures bear witness and which has been handed down in the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit, then the BEM reception process will become a process of mutual spiritual enrichment between the churches as they move forward to visible unity.

The reception of BEM involves at one and the same time a process both of self-emptying and of enrichment. The consultation thus recommended the churches of Europe to use BEM as a basis for dialogue between the different Christian traditions.

c) The third consultation in Götting, Democratic Republic of Germany, 25-28 June, 1985, dealt with "The influence of historical, political and economic factors on the reception of BEM", and the last consultation in London, United Kingdom, 18-22 November, 1985, with "A credible reception of BEM in the churches at every level of their understanding, worship and practice".

The Orthodox participation in this series of consultations was very significant and of great value, not only because of the Orthodox presence and participation but also because of the serious involvement of all the Orthodox churches and their valuable contribution. At the end of the four consultations CEC published a special volume based on the findings: *The Reception of BEM in the European Context. Report of the four Study Consultations on BEM of the Conference of European Churches, 1984-1985*, Conference of European Churches Occasional Papers 17, Geneva, Conference of European Churches, 1986.

21. J. Garshore, "Chalcedon, Lambeth, the Covenant, Lima: What Next?", in *Reform*, London, United Reformed Church, January 1985.

22. N. Nissiotis, "Foi et Constitution. Une communauté théologique de consensus (à la lumière du texte de Foi et Constitution: Baptême, Eucharistie, Ministère", in *Baptême, Eucharistie, Ministère - Une étape décisive vers l'unité*

*chrétienne?*, Université de Genève, Faculté Autonome de Théologie Protestante, *Annuaire de la Faculté*, January-February, 1984, p. 12.

23. Cf. BEM: "Baptism", §1; "Eucharist", §17.

24. *Ibid.*, §19.

25. "Ministry", §1.

26. *Ibid.*, §4.

27. "Eucharist", §18.

28. "Ministry", §1.

29. *Ibid.*, §1.

30. BEM, "Preface", p. ix.

31. Cf. I. Bria, "La réception du BEM. Une orientation théologique orthodoxe", in *Baptême, Eucharistie, Ministère - Une étape décisive vers l'unité chrétienne?*, p. 70.

32. J. Zizioulas, "The Theological Problem of 'Reception'", in *Centro Pro Unione*, (Fall 1984) 3.

33. Jean-Marie R. Tillard OP, "BEM: The Call for a Judgment upon the Churches and the Ecumenical Movement", in *Mid-Stream*, vol. 23, no. 3, July, 1984, pp. 234-242.

34. BEM, "Preface", p. ix.

35. G. Konidaris, *For the Problem of the Unity of the Churches: Is a Symphony for Leningrad (Hirovne) and Eucharist in the Ecumenical Movement Possible?*, Athens, 1978 (in Greek).

36. *Ibid.*, p. 8; see also G. Larentzakis, *The Convergence Statement on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry of the Faith and Order Commission as a Stimulus to the Work of the Churches*, (paper prepared for the second BEM Consultation, Conference of European Churches, Iserlohn, Federal Republic of Germany, 10-14 December, 1984, p. 7 (German version).

37. *Gathered for Life: Official Report*, VI Assembly World Council of Churches, Vancouver, Canada, 24 July-10 August 1983, ed. by David Gill, Geneva, World Council of Churches and Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1983; Taking Steps Towards Unity, pp. 46.

38. W.H. Lazareth, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Updated", in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 21, no. 1, 1984, p. 16.

39. Cf. that of the Lutheran Church in America, which stated the request of the Faith and Order Commission as a twofold process:

"Response," a relatively short-term process of review and study, is really the first phase of a longer-term process of "reception." "Reception" includes all the phases and aspects of a process by which a church makes the results of an ecumenical dialogue or statement part of its faith and life. It is a process which involves all believers, and all parts of the church. It may take years and occurs only as Christ graciously

accomplishes it by his Spirit. (*Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vol. I, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Paper No. 129, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1986, p. 28)

Reception thus is a process involving all parts of the church, all believers. As noted it may take years and only occurs as Christ graciously accomplishes it by "receiving" his baptism, eucharist and ministry in the sense of the term "reception". The second phase of the Commission's request involves an official response. This is what the church was being asked to do. Such a response may be seen as part of the process leading to reception, but it is not being identified with reception. The response offered here assumes that *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* is a unique document (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 31).

And the draft response of the Church of Scotland (Reformed):

"Response" is only one of the two reactions to the document which the Faith and Order Commission invites from the churches. The other is "reception." "Response" is asked for [by the end of 1985]; but "reception" will continue for many years after this initial response this year. As churches discern and work out the practical consequences which their responses entail for their relations with other churches, they will be swept beyond mere endorsement of a text: they will enter upon a process of receiving other churches as churches - Rom. 15:7: "Receive you one another as Christ also received us." Reception of this kind is what the ecumenical movement exists to promote. Only when we are a little way along this road can we arrive at a really just and of course not uncritical appreciation of what the churches are saying. (*Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89)

Another example was the draft of the Church of England:

We note that the question does not ask whether we can recognize in the text the faith of Anglicanism. It would therefore not be appropriate simply to compare what the text says with the historical formulations of the Church of England. We understand that the phrasing of the questions directs us to consider how far the Lima text reflects the apostolic faith of the universal Church: that is that faith which is "uniquely revealed in the holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation" (The Declaration of Assent. *The Canons of the Church of England*, Canon C15). The question asked of us involves the identification and affirmation of the universal Christian tradition which has been mediated to us through the various traditions of all our churches. (*Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*,

vol. III, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Paper No. 135, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1987, p. 31)

40. M. Thurian, *Quelle est la contribution spécifique de l'Orthodoxie au BEM?*, paper delivered at the Chambésy Seminar, 1 May 1985, p. 6.

41. Jean-Marie R. Tillard OP, "BEM: The Call for a Judgment upon the Churches and the Ecumenical Movement", in *Mid-Stream*, vol. 23, no. 3, July, 1984, pp. 234-242. See also Jeffrey Gros, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Introduction", in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1984, pp. 1-9.

42. A. P. F. Sell, "Responding to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: A Word to the Reformed Churches", in *Studies from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches* 3, 1984, p. 4.

43. P. Neuner, "Konvergenzen im Verständnis des geistlichen Amtes - Möglichkeiten der Rezeption. Eine katholische Überlegung zum Amts-Papier der Konvergenzklärungen der Kommission für Glauben und Kirchenverfassung des ÖRK", in *Una Sancta*, vol. 38, 1983, p. 198.

44. N. Zernow, "The Reintegration of the Christian Community and the Ecumenical Movement", in *Pro-Regno - Pro Sanctuario*, G. F. Callenbach, Nijkerk, 1980, p. 541.

45. Cf. Christos Yannaras, "Theology in Present Day in Greece", in *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, vol. 16, 1972, pp. 200ff.

46. Cf. Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Belmont, MA, 1972, pp. 114ff.

# Some Problems of Authority and Credibility in the Drafting and Reception Processes of the BEM Document

Prof. Jesse N. K. Mugambi

## 1. Introduction

The Commission on Faith and Order is a platform within the modern ecumenical movement where churches belonging to various "Confessional Families" meet and deliberate together in the quest for a common formulation of Christian doctrine and practice. My participation in the Faith and Order Commission in the late 1970s and early 1980s helped me to appreciate intricacies in ecumenical worship and practice. I learned the subtle difference between the *equality* and *equity* of *representation* and *participation*.

Despite their numerical strength, the churches of Africa were under-represented in the WCC generally and in the Faith and Order Commission in particular. The few African members of the Commission could hardly speak with one voice, also in view of the fact that they could not communicate in one language owing to the colonial history of Africa. Not only did they come from different "commonwealths" – they also represented different denominations and ecclesiastical legacies. Theological training in Africa has been conducted in languages other than the thousands that are used for worship by the majority of African Christians – English, French,

Portuguese, Arabic and Amharic.<sup>1</sup> This under-representation and lack of common points of reference meant that the few African commissioners had great difficulty in collectively putting across the perspectives of the churches in the region they represented.

Representation is meaningful and effective only if and when representatives can articulate the concerns and interests of those whom they represent, and communicate the results of that representation in return. At both ecumenical and denominational levels mainstream African ecclesiastical structures do not have the institutional capacity for such two-way feedback. The constraints are both organizational and historical. Organizationally, the bureaucratic structure of mainstream denominations inhibits the quick two-way flow of information between the top and the bottom levels of a church. Historically, mainstream denominations in Africa remain tied to the parent North Atlantic ecclesiastical bodies that established them and have continued to mentor them perhaps for too long. The controversial "Moratorium Debate" during the 1970s is a dramatic reminder of the uneasy relationship between "parent" and "daughter" churches.<sup>2</sup> At the local level in Africa, in both rural and urban contexts, the liturgical and pastoral challenges are far removed from those in Europe and North America.<sup>3</sup>

*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) was one of the greatest achievements of Faith and Order in the period of Lukas Vischer's leadership. My critical comments on the BEM document do not in any way dilute the significance of these achievements. Rather they arise out of my experience as a member of the Faith and Order Commission, recalling the power dynamics and constraints of articulating various perspectives and blending them into the formulations of the final draft presented for adoption at the Plenary Commission Meeting in Lima.

Perhaps the most remarkable success of the BEM drafting process was the interaction among the members of Faith and Order themselves, especially outside the plenary sessions and working groups. I became acquainted with many members of the

Commission from various countries and denominations, a unique exposure that greatly enhanced and broadened my ecumenical understanding and horizon. It is likely that the friends I made during that period would also affirm this sentiment from their respective personal experiences.

At this point perhaps it is worthwhile for me to add one more biographical note: I am a Kenyan, belonging to the Anglican Church of Kenya since birth, and a lay Anglican theologian teaching in an African public university. With this identity in mind, I have often wondered to what extent the "confessional families" recognized in Faith and Order represent the actual ecclesiastical reality in the contemporary world. To what extent do my fellow Anglicans from the North Atlantic share my ecclesiastical identity? Conversely, to what extent do I share their own self-understanding as "Anglicans" in their respective national identities? How does the Church of England relate with the Anglican "provinces" in other parts of the world?

These questions might be asked by my fellow African Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Moravians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Quakers, Mennonites, Pentecostals, and so on – with regard to their respective counterparts and peers in the North Atlantic. Despite the monumental role of the modern missionary enterprise in Africa, there remain unresolved problems from that legacy, problems which the modern ecumenical movement has tried to tackle since the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Scotland.<sup>4</sup>

My broad ecumenical involvement has convinced me that there is greater convergence between African Christians *across* various denominations than between themselves and their North Atlantic counterparts *within* their respective denominations. Faith and Order, as I understand, did not have any mechanism to deal with this ecclesiastical reality. Doctrinal consensus was sought and recorded more on the basis of the traditions within the confessional families than on convergence in the discernment of New Testament insights and teachings. The fact is that while in the North Atlantic

denominational and cultural identities often coincide, in Africa they do not. Only during the fourth WCC Assembly at Uppsala in 1968 was there a substantial representation of the churches from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Why did it take so long to have significant numbers of African representatives in the modern ecumenical movement? The delay had a profound impact on the agenda of deliberations in the various commissions and consultations of the WCC, including Faith and Order.

With these introductory remarks, I shall now proceed to comment on some problems of authority and credibility in the formulation and reception processes of BEM.

## 2. Between Jerusalem and Geneva

One of the most famous missionary leaders of the nineteenth century was Henry Venn. In his theory of Christian Mission, Venn challenged North Atlantic missionaries working abroad to work towards the establishment of churches that would become self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating.<sup>5</sup> He expected that missionaries should move on as soon as a Christian community had coalesced and evolved a social identity. Thus in his view, missionaries should render themselves dispensable without delay and leave the local communities to run themselves, support themselves and engage in missionary work in their turn. In practice, missionaries overstayed and stifled the growth of "self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating" churches in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. The Moratorium Debate during the 1970s was one of the heard outcomes of prolonged missionary tutelage.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century Venn's principle was followed up by another insightful missionary, Roland Allen, who raised the question whether the modern Christian missionary enterprise was faithful to St Paul's missionary methods. St Paul was always in a hurry to move on after proclaiming the gospel and

launching a Christian community with local leadership. He was not afraid that these Christian communities might "backslide" into "paganism" or Judaism. Instead of dilly-dallying he entrusted the progress of these communities to the Holy Spirit and the ingenuity of local leaders. He preferred writing letters (Epistles) rather than returning to the communities he had initiated.<sup>7</sup>

The Ecumenical Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15, Gal. 2-3) is instructive. Jerusalem, though the cradle of Christianity, could not set the norms for the new Christian community. Together, leaders from all the Christian communities gathered at Jerusalem had to deliberate and reach consensus on matters of inclusion and exclusion – what we now refer to as issues of baptism, eucharist and ministry. Cultural superiority on the part of any group or faction was declared an impediment to the Church. There would be no demand on gentiles to be proselytized into Judaism as a precondition of admission to the Church. Within the Church there would be no discrimination on the basis of race, gender, culture or status. During the Uppsala Assembly this theme of discrimination surfaced in a remarkable way, prompted by the civil crises of the 1960s. The theme of liberation was to become topical during the 1970s.<sup>8</sup>

Although the BEM document took shape during the 1970s, its conceptual framework avoided placing these central rituals (baptism, eucharist and ministry) within the contemporary cultural challenges of our time. By leaning too heavily on the ecumenical councils of the early church without reference to the Council of Jerusalem, BEM placed Tradition above Scripture. Since most of the ecumenical councils of the early church were summoned by political rulers to resolve political conflicts through the Church, their doctrinal authority and credibility may be questioned, especially when viewed from the perspective of those who do not belong to that cultural heritage. An ecumenical return to the Council of Jerusalem might provide a fresh impetus for us to revisit the core of the Christian faith anew. If we think of Jerusalem and Geneva as symbols of the ecumenical movement, we may, with Roland Allen, ask ourselves whether our ecumenical principles today are derived



from Scripture or from culture. However we answer the question, the relationship between Gospel and Culture is inescapable.

### 3. Historical setting

*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* was the outcome of more than fifty years of doctrinal debate within the Faith and Order movement launched in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1927. Since its publication in 1982 Faith and Order circulated BEM for "reception" and utilization by WCC member churches, and also by any others who would find its proposals useful and relevant. Owing to various factors, BEM did not become as "popular" as its advocates had anticipated. Despite the many responses from the churches it did not find an echo in other churches and in several regions of the world, especially in the South.

This article is intended to explore some of the factors that inhibited its acceptability, particularly those related to authority and credibility. Specifically, it raises questions pertaining to the authority and credibility on which BEM rests. For whom was the document intended? To what extent were the intended end-users consulted in the process of formulating, respectively, the three statements on baptism, eucharist and ministry? To what extent did the drafters represent the interests and aspirations of the WCC member churches? What was the "reception process" intended to achieve? With regard to the content of the document, what was the doctrinal foundation on which consensus was assumed to be vested? Institutionally, what was the ecclesiastical foundation for consensus? Ritually, what was the unifying principle in the doctrine of the eucharist?

In answer to these questions, it will be shown that as an "ecumenical" document BEM was formulated on limited procedural foundations and for that reason did not become normative for the WCC member churches. The limits of those foundations can be summarized in terms of *representation* and *participation*. Who speaks

on behalf of the Church? To what extent do ordinary members participate in the decision-making processes of the modern ecumenical movement? The authority and credibility of the modern ecumenical movement depends largely on the degree to which ordinary Christians in the WCC membership can identify themselves with the WCC leadership, procedure, structure and institutional framework. However in practice, and institutionally, the WCC remains remote from ordinary Christians in its member churches.<sup>9</sup> The majority of Christians (especially in tropical Africa) can hardly identify themselves with the document's doctrinal formulation and theological justifications.

By 1982, when the BEM document was adopted at Lima, the demographics of WCC membership had tilted towards Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Asia. Denominational diversity was much more prevalent in those areas than in Europe and North America. From the perspective of ecclesiastical practice, BEM would have become a timely instrument to heal divisions among churches planted by the modern missionary enterprise. Lamentably, the WCC leadership remained overwhelmingly Western European and North American/North Atlantic. When the Faith and Order movement was launched world-wide at the Lausanne Conference in 1927, almost all the churches involved were in Europe and North America. This leadership profile was maintained between 1927 and 1982, while the drafts of BEM were under negotiation. The leadership profile did not change to match the demographic shift. Thus the theologians who formulated BEM represented mainly the ecclesiastical traditions which, though historically influential, were currently a minority within the modern ecumenical movement.

In view of this background it is understandable that the starting point in all three sections of BEM are the Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church – mainly Nicea (CE 325) and Chalcedon (451). No mention was made of the Council of Jerusalem (48-50), the earliest Ecumenical Council on record (Acts 15; Galatians 2-3). This approach placed Tradition over Scripture, while for Southern churches the reverse order would be normative. In matters of

doctrine, Scripture takes precedence over Tradition, because as Christians we derive our convictions about Jesus from the canonical sacred texts. The doctrines associated with some (if not most) of the Ecumenical Councils are tainted, I believe, by the political and ideological circumstances under which those Councils were summoned, convened and conducted. Nicea (325) was decreed and sponsored by Emperor Constantine the Great, more for political than for doctrinal purposes.<sup>10</sup> Thus the doctrinal outcome of the Council must be viewed more as the triumph of empire than as the theological consensus of the assembled bishops.

Likewise, the Council of Chalcedon (451) was decreed by Emperor Marcian.<sup>11</sup> What was the role and interest of temporal rulers in the management of Church affairs?<sup>12</sup> Apparently, the ostracizing of some African fathers during the doctrinal debates in the Early Church had to do with both ontology and political economy.<sup>13</sup> The emperor had to maintain the unity of his empire, and the Church had to contribute towards that project, with failure to obey being tantamount to treason. The manipulation of religion for political expediency litters human history in all cultures.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. The BEM document drafting and reception processes

It is interesting to note that many African Instituted Churches have the name "Jerusalem" or "Zion" in their labels.<sup>15</sup> Jerusalem had special significance for the Christian communities in the New Testament, both as the origin of the Church and the reference point of both the Old and the New Israel. The shift of focus from Jerusalem to Rome was more political than ecclesiastical. This shift was to be contested in 1054 during the first great Schism, and again during the European Reformation from 1517 onwards. Rather surprisingly, the European Reformation, despite its insistence on the supremacy of Scripture over Tradition, did not restore the centrality of Jerusalem as the origin of the Church. Rather, the Reformers became pioneers of nationalist religious movements, each

of which superimposed a tribal cultural religious heritage onto the Christian liturgy, art and architecture which Roman Catholicism had established.

Thus the European Reformation was much more than a "doctrinal correction" of church teachings; above all, in my view, it was the religious expression of movements towards modern national sovereignty in the various countries of northern and western Europe.<sup>16</sup> Rather surprisingly, the modern missionary enterprise in Africa generally failed to recognize the similarity between the European Reformation (in relation to the existing dominant church) and the African Independent churches (in relation to colonial rule). This perhaps explains why African Independent churches have been so under-represented in the modern ecumenical movement.

As a follow-up to BEM it might be worthwhile to return to the Ecumenical Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15 and Gal. 2-3) and to explore its significance for ecumenical Christian worship and practice in the twenty-first century. The issues which the Council of Jerusalem debated have remained largely unresolved. Despite the "Declaration of Principles" at Jerusalem, discrimination and factionalism continued. The followers of Peter, Paul, James and Apollos continued to look down upon one another, and this tendency to look down upon others has continued throughout the modern missionary enterprise and the modern ecumenical movement. The "Declaration of Principles" at the Ecumenical Council of Jerusalem should teach us otherwise.<sup>17</sup> The denominationalism practised today is in conflict with the essence of the Ecumenical Council of Jerusalem, and in violation of the challenge of Jesus to his followers to live and act in unity, "that the world may believe" (John 17:20).

In view of the missionary tutelage and colonial legacy suffered by most African Protestant churches, it was totally unrealistic to expect African theologians to engage in any meaningful debate with their counterparts during the BEM deliberations. The leading theologians in the North Atlantic had the final say among themselves. When the BEM Document was circulated for

"Reception" to churches in Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Asia, there was little left to comment about, since the process was a foregone conclusion: since the "parent-churches" had consented, the "infant" churches could not object. Within the colonial settings, missionary agencies from Europe and North America effectively despised each other as they competed for converts among African communities. So negative and competitive was the relationship that the modern ecumenical movement seemed either contradictory or insincere to African Christians, who had been drilled to suspect or even despise Christians of other denominations.

This legacy still lingers on. In practice African Christians of various denominations have found greater ritual and cultural affinity among themselves, in contrast to their uneasy relationships with their parent denominations in Europe and North America. The East African Revival Movement is an interesting illustration of this fact. The movement began in Rwanda in the 1920s, and spread throughout Eastern Africa with membership in the Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Lutheran denominations. More recently, Pentecostalism has permeated the mainstream denominations in Africa to the extent that it is hardly possible now to distinguish between Pentecostal and Charismatic worship on the one hand, and the spontaneous liturgy in Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran and Moravian denominations on the other.

### 5. Six aspects of religion

According to Ninian Smart, religion is culturally manifested in six aspects: mythical, doctrinal, social, ethical, ritual and experiential.<sup>18</sup> This is a useful template with which to describe and assess religions, including Christianity. The six aspects are interrelated and integrated with each other; all aspects are present in every religion, but the emphasis varies from one religion and also from one denomination or confessional group to another. Whatever the focus, the elements used in ritual have cultural significance

Unfortunately, in mainstream African Christianity both baptism and eucharist have been culturally alienating, lacking sufficient contact with the cultures in which they are practised – hence their "Africanization" in the independent churches.<sup>19</sup>

The BEM document approaches Christianity from the ritual aspect, emphasizing three of the most distinct ritual features of Christian churches – baptism, eucharist and ministry. They are the outward or "cultural" expressions of the core beliefs of Christianity. The mythical aspect deals with stories through which a community of faith expresses its understanding of ultimate origin, ultimate purpose and ultimate destiny. From the perspective of ontology, myth serves the functional purpose of explaining those aspects of ultimate reality that cannot be described in any other way. Myth is indispensable in cultural self-understanding. When myths lose their potency and validity they are either reformulated or replaced. This is done spontaneously, irrespective of the approval or disapproval of the elite.

For this reason, doctrinal formulation should include not only the intellectual abstractions of the elite but also practical applications of ordinary believers.<sup>20</sup> The eucharist is shrouded in mythical and mystical expressions, which give it, and the Christian community which practises it, its distinct identity and without which Christianity would be little more than an association of like-minded individuals. Each of these characteristics of Christianity (baptism, eucharist and ministry) is culturally conditioned. For example, in practice, preparation for both baptism and confirmation involves initiation of the candidates into the mythical, doctrinal, ritual, social, ethical and experiential aspects of Christianity.<sup>21</sup>

Such developments are part of the normal process of authentic Christian faith expressing itself in local cultural forms. The ritual of purification using water is not unique to Christianity; the special ritual of baptism as it evolved in Christianity was a modification of cleansing rituals with which the multi-ethnic converts to Christianity were familiar. The ritual of communal sharing of a meal among believers is also not unique. The Passover was a ritual in

which a ceremonial meal was shared. Christians deliberately made their own ceremonial meal special and unique, in order to distinguish themselves from other communities of faith. Its inauguration by Jesus during the Passover was intended to establish a distinction between the "Old Israel" and the "New Israel".

I may press my point through a personal experience. One of the leading German theologians present at Lima came to me during the Christmas celebrations being held by the Orthodox at that time, asking me what I thought about the Greek and Russian Orthodox celebrations of Christmas. I replied that those, together with my experience of African Christianity, confirmed my considered view that Christianity at its best is inseparable from culture, and must always be expressed within a particular culture. The challenge is to ensure that it is Christianity which always provides the basis for cultural self-criticism and self-appraisal (and not the other way around, with the culture defining our faith). My response did not seem to satisfy him, because in his view, gospel and culture must be distinct. When I asked him about his German Christianity, he seemed puzzled by the question: it had not occurred to him that German Christianity is inseparable from the German cultural and religious heritage.

The attitude of this prominent German theologian is typical among most European and North American missionaries who have introduced Christianity to Africa. What they have brought to Africa as "Christianity pure and simple" have been their own culturally conditioned forms of Christianity, so that the proliferation of missionary denominations in tropical Africa is a testimony to the parochial appropriations of the gospel in the North Atlantic. The corresponding African reactions against missionary denominationalism are further manifestations of the Gospel-Culture tension.

There is still a long way to go before the gospel can become as rooted in African culture as to constructively transform it. In general the modern Christian missionary enterprise took a negative view of African culture, and considered African moral values, norms

and attitudes to be a negation of the Christian faith. African norms, the missionaries believed, had to be purged from the conduct of converts and replaced with the moral values, norms and attitudes of the missionary. The consequence was cultural schizophrenia in African Christianity.

African participants at the Lima Conference raised this concern from two angles. The first response was to propose a paragraph in the draft baptism statement explaining that in Africa baptism has been introduced more as a ritual of *acculturation* than as a sacrament of *conversion*. Thus what the liturgy says in writing is different from what is done in practice, and this should be corrected. Almost all African Christians today bear a European name, conferred at baptism, as an indication of their "conversion" – that is, acculturation – to "Christianity". This amendment was resisted, and African commissioners had to insist on its inclusion. It was included, though, in the Commentary rather than in the main text as the African Commissioners had proposed.

The second response was a proposal that in Faith and Order's work after Lima there should be a further exploration of the relationship between Gospel and Culture. In response to this proposal a discussion group was set up, alongside the other working groups in Lima. This working group produced a Report which became the basis of the WCC Gospel and Culture Project after the Vancouver Assembly. Interestingly, the leadership of Faith and Order did not consider the tension between Gospel and Culture as a problem – while African participants considered it the *basic* problem in the draft of BEM. Thus at Lima there emerged both conceptual and cultural barriers to consensus, barriers which were never tackled in the follow-up to the meeting because Faith and Order immediately embarked on the process of preparing the approved "Lima Text" for "reception" by WCC member churches. This background may perhaps explain why there was relatively little response to BEM from local WCC member churches in Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Ordinary Christians in these regions could not "see" and "feel" themselves in that document.

But theology cannot be conducted outside the cultural matrix within which a theologian has been brought up and trained, just as liturgy cannot be abstracted from the community of faith within which it has evolved. The BEM document did not deal sufficiently with the cultural matrices within which these rituals have become central to the various faith communities of Christianity. The consensus reached and approved at Lima was, as an abstraction, a great achievement; but as an instrument to break social barriers it was perhaps of little utility. It did not, for example, help with healing the wounds inflicted by apartheid. This could be one of the reasons why the document did not become normative among the WCC member churches.

## 6. Conclusion

These observations suggest that the drafting and approval processes culminating in the BEM document provided a useful debating platform for theologians of the major "confessional families" as they deliberated among themselves on matters of their ritual heritage, with particular reference to issues of baptism, eucharist and ministry. The churches outside this heritage could not effectively participate in the debates owing to various constraints including history, language, context and ecclesiastical self-understanding. The reception process could not bring BEM to popular acceptance within local congregations, because of the "top-down" approach by which it was formulated and handed down.

The Christian faith becomes "rooted" in a particular culture only when Christians of that culture begin to distinguish between "the Gospel as proclaimed" and "the Gospel as received".<sup>2</sup> Thereafter the rituals of baptism and eucharist "as introduced" are re-cast into the cultural idiom of the recipient culture, and they become baptism and eucharist "as appropriated". This process was accomplished in the early Church when the Judaic Passover was recast into the Lenten rituals within both the Eastern and the Western

liturgy. It was revised again during the European Reformation, when Roman Catholic rites were modified to suit the national churches of northern and western Europe.<sup>23</sup> Such re-casting as has happened in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia was not reflected in BEM, for the reasons I have suggested. Perhaps these southern perspectives may yet be recognized in texts being produced today by Faith and Order. That is my hope for the churches of the South and the North – and my hope for Faith and Order itself.

## NOTES

1. Theological training in Africa is still conducted mainly in English, French, Portuguese and Arabic while African Christians worship mainly in their respective African languages. This discrepancy between the language of training and the language of worship is perhaps one of the greatest impediments to theological creativity. Europe suffered similarly until the Reformation. When the Bible became available in local languages and liturgies were developed in those languages, Christianity was rejuvenated in unprecedented ways. The modern missionary enterprise would have been inconceivable without the Reformation.

2. For a critical evaluation of the Moratorium Debate see Elliott Kendall, *The End of an Era: Africa and the Missionary*, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1978.

3. The "contextual distance" between the respective ecclesiastical situations in Africa and the North Atlantic was dramatically illustrated by the crisis at the 1998 Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops. The triggering issue was consecration of gay bishops, but the differences have much more to do with issues of "Culture and History" than of "Faith and Order". It is not clear how BEM would help to resolve a crisis such as this one.

4. On this point see, for example, Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, London, World Dominion Press, 1912, Lutterworth, 1968; J.V. Taylor, *The Pentecost Vision*, London, SCM, 1963, Second Edition 2001, also published as *Christian Presence amid African Religion*, Nairobi, Acton, 2001.

5. Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1983, pp.158–160, 168–170.

6. I am grateful to the Rt Rev. John G. Garu for this insight. As one of the



- leading African ecumenists and a former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, he had long first-hand experience in these matters.
7. See Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours*, London, World Dominion Press, 1912; Cambridge, Luttreworth, 1968.
  8. The theme of the WCC Fifth Assembly at Nairobi in November 1975 was "Jesus Christ Fries and Unites".
  9. The problems of ownership, representation and participation are pervasive in the entire ecumenical movement. This affects national councils of churches as much as continental and regional councils of churches. The history of the World Council of Churches coincides with that of the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations. It is interesting that the power relations between nations in the UN are mirrored in the power relations between churches in the WCC.
  10. Gennadios Limouris, "Nicaea" in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1991, pp. 726-727.
  11. Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, "Chalcedon," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1991, pp. 141-143.
  12. For a discussion of this question with reference to the Early Church and contemporary Africa see Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, Oxford, Regnum, 1992.
  13. On this point see David T. Adamo, *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches*, Benin City, Nigeria, Justice Jeco Press, 2005, pp. 1-2.
  14. On this point see, for example, Eugène Porralié, *A Guide to the Thought of St. Augustine*, London, Burns and Oates, 1960; John E. Kealy and David W. Sheik, *The Early Church and Africa*, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1975.
  15. David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968; Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation*, Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, 2001.
  16. On this point see Karl Kroll, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation*, Cleveland and New York, Meridian - World Publishing Company, 1959.
  17. See J.N.K. Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*, London, Longman, 1989, pp. 28ff.; Also published as *Christianity and African Culture*, Nairobi, Acton, 2002. I am grateful to Harold Miller for his insistence on this point as a possible point of departure for more equitable cross-cultural relationships in the ecumenical movement, and also within denominations.
  18. Ninian Smart, *Religious Experience of Mankind*, Glasgow, Collins, 1969; *Dimensions of the Sacred*, Glasgow, Fontana, 2001. See also J.N.K. Mugambi, Inaugural Lecture - *Religion and Social Construction of Reality*, Nairobi, Nairobi University Press, 1996.
  19. In some (especially Roman Catholic) circles the word "inculturation" is used to describe the process of adapting North Atlantic ecclesiastical norms and practices into African worship and practice. The proper word would be "acclaturation", since it is a one-way process in which North Atlantic churches have no interest in adapting any insights from churches in other parts of the world.
  20. For the relevance of this insight in contemporary Africa see Diane Stinton, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christianity*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 2004.
  21. The uses of water in baptism, and of bread and wine in the Eucharist, are derived from cultural practices predating and extending beyond Christianity. Their wider cultural relevance should be valuable entry-points for constructive interfaith encounter.
  22. See Chris U. Mannus, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, Nairobi, Acton, 2003. David T. Adamo, *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches*, Benin City, Nigeria, Justice Jeco Press, 2005, pp. 2-6.
  23. For example, the *Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England*, 1662.

## *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the Church in Latin America

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It is with great pleasure that we have undertaken this modest study on the reception of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) in Latin America, and these reflections on the challenges of ecclesiology on that continent. In the great symphony orchestra of the ecumenical movement, Latin America might be little more than the triangle, which is only rarely heard during the performance. However, it is still a crucial instrument, indispensable at moments of great musical intensity, and it would be unimaginable for the triangle to be sounded at the wrong moment or to be silent when it should be played. Such a mistake could ruin the whole performance. Thus, the difference it makes to the sound may be much greater than the size of the instrument or the time during which it is being played. Furthermore, the triangle – which might be culturally marginal in a Western classical orchestra – is central to folk music, especially in North-Eastern Brazil, playing a crucial part in the rhythm section.

We are thus venturing into a description of how the “score” of BEM has both sounded through our triangle, and resounded as it was heard. And in this way, we are glad to join in honouring Lukas Vischer on this 80th birthday.

In the first part of this article we shall present and discuss reactions to BEM from Latin American churches; in the second we explore the ecclesiological challenges posed by the Latin American context in view of the new (and eventual convergence) document *The Nature and Mission of the Church*.<sup>1</sup>

### I. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry – the “Lima Document” in Latin America

The Lima document is certainly one of the most influential texts in the present day ecumenical movement. The official responses to the text reinforce the hitherto unheard-of character of this document, and emphasize its importance for ecumenical dialogue. Here we will deal only with reactions from Latin American churches or denominations. We also include the reaction of the Brazilian Council of Christian Churches (CONIC), which shows the position of those churches which have not reacted directly to the document, and is itself an important instance of the document's ecumenical reception.

#### A. General considerations on the document<sup>2</sup>

Some churches consider the document to be a unique landmark in the history of the ecumenical movement. According to this and other reactions, there are no doubts that it was an important step towards unity. Even the most critical reactions did not hesitate in describing the document as an impressive breakthrough.

Overall, Latin American churches highlighted the document's effort towards mutual understanding and recognition of baptism, eucharist and ministry as well as for clearing up misunderstandings, prejudices and taboos; the document's important role in church relations around the world; and the challenges the document poses to each particular tradition. Some churches observed, however, that the language used was exceedingly technical.<sup>3</sup> It was also stated that

the document made an “optimistic” use of language, as if in each and every case an ideal formulation had been attained.<sup>4</sup>

The method used to assess BEM asked the churches to express themselves about its fidelity to common tradition, referred to in the document by formulations such as “the faith of the Church through the ages”, “in the early centuries”, “since the earliest days”, “in the early Church”, “during the second and third centuries”, “soon”, “the earliest Church” (Preface; “Baptism”, §19; “Eucharist”, §19; Commentary; “Ministry”, §17, Commentary; “Ministry”, §19; “Ministry”, §21; “Ministry”, §21, Commentary).<sup>5</sup> Some churches saw in these references a clear preference for a specific concept of the Church of the second and third centuries, disregarding the diversity of concepts present in biblical witness.<sup>6</sup>

The strongest consensus among Latin American critical reactions, however, lies in relation to the ecclesiological issues which underlie and support the document. Linked to these are reservations about the strong emphasis on ordained ministry and on sacraments (baptism, eucharist). Latin American churches understand that contextual elements determining the understanding of practices (baptism, eucharist, ministry) have not been duly considered, and that little emphasis was given to their social and political implications.<sup>7</sup>

#### B. The churches' reactions on baptism, eucharist and ministry

##### 1. Considerations on baptism

The chapter on baptism was found to be a very adequate formulation, thus reactions were generally brief, positive and with few reservations. Most churches expressed their agreement mainly in the rich prospects of baptism's meaning as described in BEM (“Baptism”, §§2-7): incorporation into Christ's body and participation in his death and resurrection. However, churches expressed disagreement with the language used to deal with its meaning (baptism “is”, “led”, “implies” etc.).<sup>8</sup>

Churches generally praised the biblical legitimization given in

the chapter on baptism and synthesizing New Testament witness on it ("Baptism", §§1-2), mainly because of the emphasis on the trinitarian formula which is unanimously accepted by all churches. All churches also believe that by God's grace and power the baptized person is incorporated into Christ's body and sealed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

Although the document stresses correctly that baptism refers to new life in Christ, which according to the New Testament has ethical consequences ("Baptism", §§4,10), reactions argued that these ethical consequences were not dealt with in detail. For Latin American churches, Jesus Christ's call to discipleship must be emphasized and deepened as a concrete response in life.

Many reactions also referred to the relationship between baptism and faith. According to the churches the statement that baptism is "simultaneously God's gift and our response to this gift" ("Baptism", §8) questions both the relationship between the gift of God's grace and human response, as well as our own understanding of grace. For some churches the meaning of grace and faith as treated in the text then becomes imprecise.<sup>10</sup>

The understanding of the Holy Spirit's action "before, in and after" baptism ("Baptism", §5) was questioned by some churches, as it seems to presuppose a general and undifferentiated action of the Spirit in all of humankind.<sup>11</sup> Churches hailed the document's emphasis on baptismal initiation ("Baptism", §9) as a process with all necessary elements. The need to identify the different steps in the procedure (baptism, anointing, confirmation) is a complement to the need for specifying the place of signs in the gift of the Spirit. Regarding the place where this gift happens the emphases vary. There is, however, an agreement on the fundamental aspect that Christian "Baptism is in water and the Holy Spirit" ("Baptism", §14).

Regarding the appropriate moment for baptism – infancy or adulthood – churches expressed congratulations about the document's formulation ("Baptism", §§11-13), which considers both possibilities of baptismal practice: child baptism and adult

baptism. This distinction and opposition is inadequate, however.<sup>12</sup> The actual opposition is between those baptizing at any stage of life, and those baptizing only believers who are able to profess their faith personally. The document stressed that baptism is not repeatable and exhorted that "re-baptism must be avoided".<sup>13</sup> It does recommend, though, that where mutual recognition of baptism is possible it be done "explicitly" ("Baptism", §15).

## *2. Considerations regarding the eucharist*

The churches supported the emphasis given to communion; to the twofold understanding of communion being both communion with Christ and communion of believers with each other;<sup>14</sup> to the real presence of Christ;<sup>15</sup> to the forgiveness of sins;<sup>16</sup> to the anticipatory character of the Supper;<sup>17</sup> and to its ethical and social implications.<sup>18</sup>

The churches declared that this chapter enriched them when it mentioned practices of different traditions, but they felt that the descriptive focus prevails over the guidelines of scriptural witness.<sup>19</sup> To a certain extent this descriptive emphasis brings about a plurality of terms in the text (eucharist, Lord's supper).<sup>20</sup> This also reflects on the precision of the terminology used.<sup>21</sup> If on the one hand the diversity of confessional heritage present in the liturgical proposal enriches the understanding of communion, on the other hand it dilutes its meaning and weakens biblical witness.<sup>22</sup>

The most critical reactions addressed the emphasis given to the eucharist as a central act in the Church's worship. Some churches mentioned that such an emphasis implies reducing the value of the Word as it is proclaimed by other, non-sacramental means. Other churches even reminded us that this emphasis could lead to a separation between word and sacrament.<sup>23</sup> The emphasis on the central character of ordained ministers in liturgy, and their exclusive presidency, reinforces institutional mechanisms, but apparently intends to secure correct ritual order; this raises questions about the weight of the *ex opere operato* in the eucharistic conception of the document.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. *Considerations on ministry*

The chapter on ministry brought about two opposite reactions from Latin American churches. The Anglicans found this chapter "excellent";<sup>25</sup> the Waldensians declared this to be the "most controversial of all" chapters.<sup>26</sup> In spite of such opposite reactions, careful reading shows clear agreements among churches.

Churches agree on the following items: the ordained ministry is linked to the ministry of community, which derives from Godself; ordained ministry is included in the service to which God's people as a whole is called; that function is carried out together with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup>

It has been pointed out, however, that there is an exaggerated focus on ordained ministry as being "constitutive for the life and witness of the Church" ("Ministry", §8).<sup>28</sup> Although churches stated that the document relates ordained ministry positively to the ministry of all of God's people, they understand the text to be too timid in the way it stresses that ordination is sustained only when it is linked to the mandate given to *all* of God's people. In this sense the additional emphasis given to the "ministry of *épiscopaté*" brought about strong criticism. It was argued that there is no New Testament support for the idea that unity is essentially linked to this ministry being carried out by one person.<sup>29</sup>

The churches therefore consider "Ministry", §§32-33, to be very good, and affirm that it is precisely the variety of charisms that should prevail.<sup>30</sup> For the same reason, the reactions to the subject of apostolic tradition and succession were correspondingly critical. The document mentions adequately that the evolution of both themes is conditioned by social and cultural factors. Some argued that, for the sake of coherence, BEM should clearly show this evolution.<sup>31</sup> The document, however, does state the need to discern clearly the apostolic tradition of the *whole* church and the succession of apostolic ministry ("Ministry", §34, Commentary).<sup>32</sup>

One last item raising strong reactions was the emphasis given to the ordained ministry in its threefold form: episcopal, diaconal and

presbyteral. Although churches recognize the threefold ministry as a model with undoubted historical precedence in Christian communities, they insist that it is only a model. They therefore strongly criticize narrowing the concept of ministry to its threefold form.<sup>33</sup> The churches' perception is that in this chapter, too, the historical development of the "early Church" has a greater weight than the diversity of the biblical witness.

### C. *Concluding remarks*

BEM has been proposed as a document of convergence. It was thus the initial threshold in the search for "real consensus". Immediate adhesion to all its points was not expected, and prudence suggested the horizon of a "long process of reception". This reception process showed that the document is able to trigger deep debates and create new goals.<sup>34</sup>

The reference made to a given, specific ecclesiastical heritage; the emphasis on one model of ministerial practice (bishop, presbyter, deacon); the weight of the ordained ministry; the document's strong emphasis on sacrament (baptism, eucharist) — all this would show an institutionalizing, hierarchy-stressing and power-concentrating ecclesiology undergirding the document.<sup>35</sup> Criticism of those aspects is perfectly understandable in a continent going through a revitalization of theology, of community life, and with the public involvement of the life of faith coming precisely from below, from lay movements.<sup>36</sup>

The Latin American context has changed a great deal, however. There are signs of a growing trend reinforcing church structures and hierarchical images.<sup>37</sup> In the Pentecostal movement the charism of preaching has been complemented by those of prophecy and healing — along with instituting traditional power figures such as bishops and apostles. Historic churches, among them mainly the Protestant ones, face increasing demands to create or reinforce existing structures.<sup>38</sup> All this seems to indicate that presently the context



demands strong, centralizing, hierarchical and economically successful churches.

Also regarding sacraments, there have been considerable changes. During their consultation process, churches had already found that re-baptism was a common practice in Latin America. This practice certainly has been growing; the attractive power of Pentecostalism helps this by emphasizing "baptism in the Spirit". For the historic churches, the growth of these practices internally is causing more and more difficulty.

More than in the mid-1980s, the Lima document today has become an ecumenical text within the churches themselves. It can make significant contributions in the present moment: for instance through its emphasis on the unique character of baptism, and the refusal to distinguish between baptism in the water and baptism in the Spirit. It also emphasizes the necessary relationship between the ordained ministry and the calling to all of God's people ("Ministry", §§1-6, 15-16), presenting valuable elements for the churches for their reflection on women's ordination to ministry ("Ministry", §18 and Commentary).

According to former World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Konrad Raiser, there is today a sufficient common understanding of baptism as a foundation for mutual recognition. He suggested that ecumenical reflection should place greater emphasis on baptism.<sup>39</sup> By anchoring the ecumenical call in the life of each Christian, baptism would have clear ecclesial ecumenical consequences. For instance this would open the way to overcoming the trend, mentioned above, of strengthening the sacramental and clerical elements in the church – precisely those elements which Latin American churches say are too strongly present in BEM.

Considering that visible unity presupposes "one faith and one eucharistic communion", we should finally stress Lukas Vischer's thoughts on the Lima document. He points out that there are two trends in the reaction to it: some understand that it is a first step, and that it is necessary to seek an agreement about apostolic faith; others understand that agreement on those subjects already means

agreement on apostolic faith. Each position in isolation is inadequate and must be criticized. There is no doubt that apostolic faith is confessed not only through words, but also in and by means of sacraments and church structures – which is not enough to warrant unity in apostolic faith. The question remains open, then, as to how churches today can interpret, proclaim and convey that faith entrusted to the apostles.<sup>40</sup> This means the process of reception needs to continue.

## II. On the way to a new convergence document: ecclesiological challenges

### A. A changing religious field

Ecclesiology is certainly one of the most burning issues in Latin American churches, although it is rather seldom explicitly treated.<sup>41</sup> Demographics say that over the last decades the Roman Catholic Church, dominant since the beginning of European colonization and for long virtually the only Christian church on the continent), is declining numerically, giving way to an unprecedented growth of mainly Pentecostal and Neo-pentecostal churches. In Brazil, the percentage of those who declared themselves Catholics had a fall of nearly 10% in only ten years, from 83.3% (1991) to 73.6% (2000).<sup>42</sup> So-called "*evangélicos*" or "*crentes*" (believers), essentially Pentecostals and Neo-pentecostals, nearly doubled in the same period, jumping from 7% to 13.1%, while WCC-linked churches have stagnated, diminishing their share of the population from 1.62% to 1.6%.<sup>43</sup> Without doubt there are already many more pastors than priests, allowing these growing churches to practise more intensive pastoral care and to retain members more effectively than the traditional churches. And the growing churches are marked by active membership: while there are many "non-practising" members in the historic churches (Catholics, and to an extent also Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists,

Presbyterians) there is certainly nothing like this category in Pentecostal churches, where church attendance is highly regular.

This massive movement in the Brazilian religious field – and similar things can be said for the whole continent<sup>44</sup> – is the result of an aggressive propagation of certain “evangelical” forms of Christianity, not least through the use of mass media. As most converts have been Christians before, this kind of proselytism makes mission and ecumenism appear as total antipodes: *either* you are ecumenical (and then you apparently forget about mission), *or* you are concerned about mission (and should you be successful in attracting many faithful, you will invariably join the choir of those who condemn ecumenism along with other evil influences, including Catholicism). Interestingly enough, in an interview given to one of our students by a Baptist minister, the latter affirmed that he was in favour of dialogue among churches (except for the Roman Catholic Church), but totally opposed to “ecumenism”. Similarly, in an inter-confessional course in theology for practising ministers, undertaken to complement their studies in order to have their seminar diploma recognized by the Brazilian Ministry of Education, the week on ecumenism was placed at the end of the programme and renamed as “dialogue between churches” in order to avoid being associated with something seen as dangerous and harmful. And the reality is that even where ecumenism is, in principle, approved it tends often to exclude the Roman Catholic Church.

### *B. Anti-catholicism*

One must not forget that there is a long tradition of anti-catholicism among the historical Protestant churches which were founded by North American missionaries in the 19th century. For one thing the missionaries, mainly from the South of the United States, brought anti-catholicism with them. Then restrictions imposed by the Brazilian imperial government certainly reinforced this attitude: “The Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion shall continue to be the religion of the Empire. All other religions shall

be permitted with their domestic or private worship, in houses destined towards this purpose, without any outward appearance of a church”, as stated by the 1824 constitution.<sup>45</sup> For some time, Brazilian Protestant churches were seen as progressive and partners for a Republican state and constitution.<sup>46</sup> But although church and state were formally separated early in 1890, both Roman Catholic influence – although now indirect – and Protestant anti-catholicism remained in place. Unfortunately, despite important ecumenical advances from the 1930s to the 1980s the majority of Protestants, and indeed many Protestant churches, remained distant from ecumenism, and especially from the Roman Catholic Church. The Pentecostal and Neo-pentecostal influence, in terms both of outward competition and of inward pressure for “charismatization”, has only reinforced this tendency.

#### *1. A case study*

As a specific case illustrating these trends we may give some details about the Brazilian Methodist Church, which is traditionally ecumenical and socially progressive but which has recently succumbed to inward anti-ecumenical pressures which have been building up for some time. In 2002, a Methodist bishop wrote to an ecumenical non-governmental organization (NGO) following an ecumenical worship service held on the city of Salvador de Bahia’s central square (called “*Terreiro de Jesus*”). On behalf of the members of this episcopal region, he protested against what was interpreted as an inter-religious ceremony (“*terreiro*”, literally “a plain and extended piece of land”, is also used to refer to Afro-Brazilian – that is, indigenous rather than Christian – worship places). Unfortunately neither the people directly concerned, nor the bishop, undertook any research to verify whether this accusation could be sustained. In fact the full name of the Square is “*Terreiro das Irmãs da Companhia de Jesus*”, (“the Jesuit Fathers’ land”, it having belonged to the Jesuit order in earlier times). Thus this square has nothing to do with Afro-Brazilian religions, despite their generally strong presence in Salvador.

In 2005 the Methodist Church decided not to participate officially in the National Council of Churches' Ecumenical Lenten Campaign. This decision, different from that taken in 2000, was clearly a consequence of the growing charismaticization and resulting anti-catholicism, as the Lenten Campaigns are a Catholic tradition. At this point the bishops did not prohibit episcopal regions, church districts, congregations and ministers from taking part in their own name, and a good number of them did so.

At its recent 18th General Council, however, the Brazilian Methodist Church decided on July 17th, 2006 to leave all ecumenical institutions which have among its members "the Catholic Church or non-Christian groups". This decision, tragic as it may be, does not mark anything totally new, but is the fruit of a long-standing process in which different tendencies have been fighting to win the balance. A candidate for the episcopate in question, known earlier as a moderate, had affirmed that three evils were haunting the Methodist Church and had to be expurged: the relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, "liberalism", and "leftovers" of liberation theology. He was elected, while the sitting bishop of the respective episcopal region lost his mandate.<sup>47</sup> In this case the ecumenists within the church lost their case. It is difficult to measure at this point how far-reaching the consequences might be.

Ironically only one day later the World Methodist Council unanimously decided at its meeting in Seoul to associate itself with the Common Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification issued by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, which had been until then a bilateral document of "differentiated consensus" between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.<sup>48</sup> The same Council elected Brazilian Methodist bishop Paulo Lockmann as its vice-president, leaving the Methodist Church in Brazil in the odd situation of being "anti-catholic" just as its international representation is striving towards deepening ecumenical relations with the Roman Catholic Church. It can only be hoped that intra-

Methodist ecumenism will be able to relativize the attitude of the church in Brazil.

It must be added that the Brazilian Catholic Bishops' Conference wrote a letter to the Methodist Church which is a very positive sign of ecumenical sensitivity:

The Methodist Church has an important role to play for Christian witness in Brazil, and we know that it was in the midst of suffering and also doubts and perplexities that the conciliar decision was taken. May the Spirit enlighten the Methodist Church and ourselves, showing us the way and the mode of our reencounter in order to thank God for all which unites us and to seek, together, to overcome the difficulties that might have emerged in our past history because of our human frailty and our lack of care or even because of our sin. We are conscious that we need and can work together in the common service to the Gospel and the People of God.<sup>49</sup>

This humble and constructive statement, offering a new approach to each other without polemic or arrogance, came like a balm to the newly opened wounds of the serious ecumenical setback which had occurred.

The example of the Methodist Church in Brazil is, unfortunately, typical for many protestant churches. Charismatic movements are strong and only becoming stronger in historic protestant churches, as within the Roman Catholic Church. However Roman Catholic charismatics maintain a strong commitment to the church hierarchy and to the Holy Father, as well as to the saints (these being the main aspects which distinguish them from other charismatic movements and (neo-)pentecostal churches). Roman Catholics maintain church unity in these respects, while "evangelicals" very easily create new churches: according to a survey carried out in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1990s, a new church was founded on each workday,<sup>50</sup> many of these bodies have quite exotic names.<sup>51</sup>

### C. Lack of theological education

Another saddening factor is the lack of good theological education. On the internet a good number of courses by extension can be found, offered via the internet or by correspondence. One of them, for example, offers five blocks on theology (20 chapters), church administration (29 chapters), tithes and offerings (9 chapters), speech, discourse, preaching and ministrations (8 chapters), and Brazilian constitution and laws applied to churches and ministers (11 chapters). According to the website, all this can be mastered by a dedicated student within 90 days – and can be had, with a good discount to be sure, for only USD 400. This interdenominational “Brazilian Theological Seminary” also offers diplomas, ordination, and even Master’s and Doctor’s courses – none of which are, of course, recognized by the Ministry of Education.<sup>52</sup> This is just an example of how the fastest-growing churches invest very little in theological education and, if they do, their courses are mainly practical in orientation and spare little for critical theological reflection. This sobering fact means that ecumenical reflection on ecclesiology, or indeed on any serious theological topic, is doomed to be only available to, and understandable by, a very select number of persons – who are probably not those who reach a numerous public. In this context it is hardly surprising that even more popular versions of Faith and Order documents are used only very scarcely.<sup>53</sup>

### D. Mission and ecumenism

In terms of ecclesiology, this situation poses a number of challenges which will most certainly obstruct the reception of the recent text *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. While the reference to the *mission* of the Church, rather than to its “purpose” as the earlier draft had it,<sup>54</sup> will certainly be welcome, the discussion on the nature of the church is easily prone to getting bogged down. A Consultation on Ecclesiology involving Faith and Order

Commissioners residing in Latin America resulted in a document distributed at the Faith and Order Plenary Commission Meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2004. Commenting on the new draft, this stated the following as needing further reflection:

In Latin America, the challenge of mission is of special urgency. On the one hand, the growing number of those who do not confess any religion is signalling a new phenomenon. On the other hand, the rapid diversification of the religious field is resulting in a highly competitive “market”. How can we be, in this context, witnesses of Christ in an ecumenical perspective and cooperation?<sup>55</sup>

The Ecumenical Congress “Mission and Ecumenism in Latin America”, held for some 100 students of theology of Latin America and other parts of the world, was also dedicated to this question. Ecclesiological questions were present, although not often made explicit. In our perception the Congress participants were able to discover that their mission as Christians is an ecumenical mission – a mission *in* the inhabited world (the *oikoumene*), a mission *to* all the world (especially the most needy), and a mission *with* all people everywhere (in a great ecumenical sharing, in which all have something to learn and all have something to give).<sup>56</sup> Among other terms “hospitality”, as emphasized by Konrad Raiser in the inaugural lecture for the Congress, and “*convivência*” (communal interaction, as developed in Latin American missiology by Roberto Zwetsch and others), were offered to express an ecumenical mission. Roman Catholic theologian Luiz Carlos Susin advocated “religious biodiversity” as an experience of incarnated salvation, and described mission as playing our instrument tunelessly within the divine “symphony” composed by a creative God, and already being played.<sup>57</sup>

### E. Church and culture

Difference is not only created by different ways of being church, but also by *cultural differences* (and churches have their share in this

as well, both by assimilating and rejecting the people's culture). Thus it is here that we see another challenge for the reception today of a convergence document on ecclesiology. Definitions of what the Church is, or ought to be, are fine – but how is the Church being lived out as a matter of fact? In Brazil, as in the whole of Latin America, syncretistic phenomena are common – although not always admitted – and multiple religious belonging is a feature which leaves boundaries of religious identity fluid. It is, therefore, necessary to dialogue with cultural, anthropological and sociological studies produced and developed all over the continent in order to understand the context within which ecclesiology can be developed.<sup>58</sup>

Although the passage on culture in the latest Faith and Order ecclesiology text has improved considerably, it does not go deeply enough into this matter.<sup>59</sup> It rightly points to earlier reflections by Faith and Order in its study on hermeneutics,<sup>60</sup> but does not touch upon the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) "Gospel and Culture" study process which led up to the World Mission Conference at Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, in 1996.<sup>61</sup> In any case when it is said that "Problems are created when one culture seeks to capture the Gospel and claims to be the one and only authentic way of celebrating the Gospel..."<sup>62</sup> then "culture" appears to be seen in a macro-perspective, and as if it were something closed and stable. Of course this is not wrong, and there certainly are and have been self-perceptions of cultural superiority which have been imposed on others. But this is far too generic a description to be meaningful for situations in Brazil and Latin America, and probably elsewhere as well.

#### *F. Ecumenism and justice*

Recent studies aimed at retrieving the memory of the ecumenical movement in Brazil have insisted on the close connection between ecumenism and the struggle for justice. The Amazon ecumenical movement, for instance, began with a

mobilization against the imprisonment of two French priests as "communists" under the military regime in the early 1980s. This mobilization gave birth to a movement which until today entertains close links between Christians of different denominations and churches, and which has founded a council of churches, a popular university (offering courses for persons without access to public or private universities, due to lack of prior education or funds) and a theological institute.<sup>63</sup>

Many of those who were persecuted by the state because of their critical political stance were also marginalized by their churches. They found, however, strong support from the WCC and other ecumenical institutions. The well-known Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, had to go into exile and found an excellent basis to continue his work in the WCC during the 1970s.<sup>64</sup> Many others from Latin America came to work in the WCC and other bodies, both confessional and ecumenical; their influence was particularly strong in the 1960s and 1970s and invariably included the struggle for justice and against economic, social and political oppression. To make this issue not only a "practical" but also an ecclesiological one, is certainly a most profound contribution of Latin America to the worldwide ecumenical movement. Although much less visible today and certainly diversified in its forms of appearance, this type of ecumenism remains alive and well, not least in ecumenical organisms such as the Ecumenical Coordination of Service (CESE) in Salvador de Bahia, founded in 1973 following a WCC-sponsored conference on Koinonia in Rio de Janeiro, and the Ecumenical Centre for Evangelization, Capacity Building and Consultancy (CECA), which have played an important role in fostering both theological, liberative reflection and diaconal action.<sup>65</sup>

The latest Faith and Order text *The Nature and Mission of the Church* does speak about the Church "In and for the World" (chapter IV), and important statements are being made here; but this comes more as an appendix than as a real passion. The section is also quite short, despite having gained two paragraphs over the previous draft. Perhaps it is because the text is rather general in its approach that



everyone easily agrees; but no one is really being challenged either – notably there are no “boxes” in this section registering major divergences, as happens in other parts of the text. This is lamentable, as this issue could speak in a particular way to Latin American ecumenists and others engaged in the struggle for justice. (This is not to say that it is only this aspect which is interesting or fruitful for the Latin American context; but it is certainly an area where many Brazilians and Latin Americans with a high esteem for ecumenism are engaged with a particular passion.)

In the same section of *The Nature and Mission of the Church* it is said that Christians “both can and should join together with the adherents of other religions, as well as with all persons of good will”, in order to promote “the social goods of justice, peace and the protection of the environment”.<sup>66</sup> The text affirms that as they “collaborate with political and economical authorities to promote the values of God’s Kingdom, and to oppose policies and initiatives which contradict them”, Christians “may stand in the tradition of the prophets who proclaimed God’s judgement on all injustice.”<sup>67</sup>

The well-known idea that “doctrine divides, but action unites” is certainly close to many Latin American ecumenists. However, the document poses here a healthy challenge. It first states that “there are occasions when ethical issues challenge the integrity of the Christian community itself and make it necessary to take a common stance to preserve its authenticity and credibility”, and then suggests that there are, indeed, disagreements on ethical positions which “demand that dialogue continue in an effort to discover whether such differences can ultimately be overcome – and, if not, whether they are truly church-dividing”.<sup>68</sup> It becomes clear here that ethical and doctrinal questions cannot be separated.

A sad example involving a very serious conflict is the recent schism in the Brazilian Anglican Church, whose northeastern diocese of Recife joined with Anglicans abroad in fierce opposition against the consecration of Gene Robinson as bishop in New Hampshire (USA) because he is openly homosexual. The schism arose because the bishop of Recife was not able to dialogue with his

episcopal colleagues in Brazil, and disrespected elements of canon law. In this case, doctrinal and ethical aspects clearly mingle. Russian Orthodox Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev believes that the main discrepancy in Christianity is not between confessional families but between “traditional and liberal versions of Christianity”. His conviction is that:

the recent liberalization of “faith and order”, of dogma and morality within a number of Western churches of the Reformation has alienated them from the traditional churches – notably from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches – more than several preceding centuries of Protestant history.<sup>69</sup>

So the challenge for churches and ecumenism in Latin America is to see the doctrinal implications of ethical questions, and to recognize that doctrinal differences might still be important and have to be tackled, even if they appear at the moment to be unimportant.

### 6. Concluding remarks

These are some of the issues which, in our view, need particular attention in the Brazilian and Latin American contexts. Others could be added such as ecological concerns, which are here subsumed under issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.<sup>70</sup>

The link between mission and ecumenism in relation to the very concept of the Church, seems to us the most burning issue today: how to be the church, a church united in diversity and cooperating rather than competing in mission? The notion of mutual accountability, not least as developed by José Míguez Bonino, points towards a good direction for this journey,<sup>71</sup> and it is certainly crucial that hermeneutical questions are taken into consideration, for there can be no proper reasoning on ecclesiology without taking hermeneutics into account.

As has become evident, the Latin American triangle does not fit too easily into the convergence symphony of *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, nor does the latter easily resound with the current challenges facing the ecumenical movement in Brazil and Latin America. To us the context seems less favourable than 25 years ago, when BEM was launched. However by being creative with both the document and its implications, an interesting piece of music – if not a symphony – could arise. The result might be more challenging than pleasing, but could still have a positive effect. In any case, the process of reception has been launched. Hundreds of copies of the Spanish version of the text (*Naturalaleza y misión de la Iglesia*) were distributed to participants at the meeting of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAD) in February, 2007, and to the local churches asking for comments and answers for the end of 2007; it was also presented during the WCC's 9th Assembly in the "Círculo teológico", a place for presentation and discussion on books. We hope that many engage with the text, and that this process will be challenging and helpful for Christians and the churches in Latin America – and for Faith and Order itself.

## NOTES

1. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2005.
2. Church reactions will be mentioned according to the six-volume edition of *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vols. I-VI, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Papers No. 129, 132, 133, 137, 143, 144 respectively, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1986-1988. The authors wish to thank the Secretariat of the Commission on Faith and Order for providing us with the texts and volume which were missing.
3. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 118.
4. Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, in *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 101.
5. *Documento de Curitiba – BEM*, National Council of Christian Churches in Brazil (CONIC), Curitiba, 22-26 July 1985 (seminar organized by CONIC with the participation of member churches and observers).
6. *Ibid.*

7. Anglicans and Waldensians contested this definition. See the response of the Anglican Church of the Southern Cone in *Churches respond to BEM*, in *op. cit.* vol. I, p. 35.
8. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 125.
9. Anglican Church of the Southern Cone, in *op. cit.*, p. 56; Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, p. 125.
10. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 127; CONIC, *op. cit.* Mimeo.
11. Churches insist one must not forget baptism as God's free and gracious gift instead of a ritual with automatic effects, thus avoiding any "mechanical concept of baptism" tending to a "magical understanding of sacrament".
12. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, p. 125.
13. All these issues are, however, made clear at the end of B. 8, when talking on the "need for faith to receive salvation", and in B. 10, on the subject of baptism as "God's gift to all his people".
14. Faith and Order only intended to emphasize that the Spirit is active while leading the person to baptism as well as during baptismal action and in strengthening the believer's life after baptism.
15. If one assumes that both practices imply God's initiative in Christ and express a response of faith from the congregation, this difference or opposition is substantially reduced.
16. However the diversity of responses suggests an additional difficulty, since churches refusing infant baptism do not regard adult baptism as being "re-baptism".
17. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, p. 120; Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, in *op. cit.*, p. 100.
18. Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, in *op. cit.*, p. 100; CONIC, *op. cit.*
19. Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, in *op. cit.*, p. 100; Evangelical Church of the River Plate (Argentina), in *op. cit.*, vol. V, p. 176.
20. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, p. 120; Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, in *op. cit.*, p. 100.
21. CONIC suggests widening the concept of commitment, the dimension of eschatology and of eucharistic hospitality. CONIC, *op. cit.*
22. Anglican Church of the Southern Cone, in *Churches Respond to BEM*, *op. cit.*, p. 39; Evangelical Church of the River Plate (Argentina), in *op. cit.*, p. 176.
23. Terms would already indicate clear doctrinal positions. Anglican Church of the Southern Cone, in *op. cit.*, p. 58; Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, p. 121.
24. For instance the words used in the instruction (*anamnesis*, commitment and death of Christ for burial of sins) are not precise. Anglican Church of the Southern

- Cone, in *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59. The same is true for the issues regarding liturgical order of the Supper as proposed in the document ("Eucharist", §27).
22. Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, p. 176; Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, p. 121
  23. Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, in *op. cit.*, p. 100, point 3.2.
  24. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, pp. 119-121.
  25. Anglican Church of the Southern Cone, in *op. cit.*, p. 59.
  26. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, p. 121.
  27. Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, in *op. cit.*, p. 191.
  28. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, pp. 121, 123.
  29. Evangelical Church of the River Plate (Argentina), in *op. cit.*, p. 177; Anglican Church of the Southern Cone, in *op. cit.*, p. 59.
  30. Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, in *op. cit.*, p. 191.
  31. Anglican Church of the Southern Cone, in *op. cit.*, p. 59. The Anglicans also recognize that this is a touchy topic for Protestants. Lutherans suggested more attention to the Reformation tradition regarding ministry. Evangelical Church of the River Plate (Argentina), in *op. cit.*, p. 177.
  32. See the following critical comments: Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, p. 123; Evangelical Church of the River Plate (Argentina), in *op. cit.*, p. 123; Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, in *op. cit.*, p. 100, 3.1, 3.2.
  33. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, p. 123.
  34. Evangelical Church of the River Plate (Argentina), in *op. cit.*, p. 177. Anglican Church of the Southern Cone, in *op. cit.*, p. 60, made a very positive assessment.
  35. CONIC has for several years been working in nationwide seminars on the subjects of BEM. Also the Bilateral Roman Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran Commission has been working on document topics.
  36. Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, in *op. cit.*, p. 191.
  37. Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate, in *op. cit.*, pp. 120, 121-123, 126-127; CONIC, *op. cit.*
  38. Leonardo Boff, *Ecclésiogenèse: the base communities reinvent the Church*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1986.
  39. Lutheran churches currently have a hot discussion on episcopate; New Pentecostal churches institute the episcopate, inspired by Scripture, some are even installing new leadership figures, such as that of the apostle.

38. The former seem to be concerned with creating greater cohesion in their churches; the latter seem moved by fear of dispersion. The concept of a "poor, weak Church", so radically emphasized by Waldensians during the BEM process, seems today very far removed from the churches' thinking.
39. Konrad Raiser, "Der Weg der Ökumene: Dank und Verpflichtung. Themenbereich 2: Einheit suchen – in Vielfalt einander begegnen, Donnerstag, 29. Mai 2003", in *Ihr sollt ein Segen sein: ökumenischer Kirchentag, 28. Mai - 1. Juni 2003 in Berlin: Dokumentation*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2004, pp. 416-428.
40. Lukas Vischer, "Unity in Faith", in *Ecumenical perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Paper No. 116, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1983, pp. 1-11.
41. Recent Roman Catholic publications on ecclesiology in an ecumenical perspective include Elias Wolff, "Igrejas e ecumenismo: uma relação identitária", in *Estudos Teológicos* 45/2, 2005, pp. 18-30; also *A unidade na diversidade*, ed. by José Bizon et al., São Paulo, Loyola, 2004, esp. pp. 77-104, 141-180, 199-260. On the Protestant side, we should mention José Míguez Bonino, *Faces of Latin American Protestantism*, Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans, 1997, inasmuch as it reflects on Protestant identity as "liberal", "evangelical", "pentecostal" and "ethnic" (i.e. immigration churches), suggesting the Trinity as hermeneutic criterion in search of coherence and mission as material principle in search of unity for a Latin American Protestant theology. There are also essays on Pentecostal ecclesiology, like Nicaraguan Javier Orozco P., "La Ecclesiología Pentecostal", in *Kairos* 12/24, 1999, pp. 9-22.
42. Cf. Gerd-Uwe Kliever, "Effervescent Diversity: Religions and Churches in Brazil Today", in *The Ecumenical Review*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, vol. 57, no. 3, 2005, pp. 314-321, esp. Table 2 on p. 318.
43. In Brazil there are currently five member churches of the WCC: The Episcopal Anglican Church, the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, the Christian Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, and the United Presbyterian Church. The Pentecostal "Brazil for Christ" Church had once been a member, but left the WCC after the death of its founder, Manoel de Mello, although there are still contacts. The Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil has applied for membership and was received on provisional terms by the WCC Central Committee in September 2006.
44. The literature on this phenomenon is growing very fast. It has been studied since the 1960s, when Christian Lalive d'Épigny and Emilio Willems pioneered sociological studies, and of course Walter Hollenweger has been the first to promote Pentecostal studies in general. Here, I just quote two more recent, but already classical studies as well as a yet more recent book, all available in English:

- David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993; David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999.
- Richard Shaull and Waldo Cesar, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Church: Promises, Limitations, Challenges*, Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans, 2000. See also E.A. Wilson, "Brazil", in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. by Stanley M. Burgess and Edward M. van der Maas, revised and expanded edition, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2002, pp.35-42. In general, there are many excellent sociological, but rather few in-depth theological studies (i.e. not simply apologetics or polemics) on the matter.
45. Duncan Alexander Reilly, *História documental do protestantismo no Brasil*, 3rd rev. ed., São Paulo, ASTE, 2003), p.48, (translation mine).
46. Cf. David Gueiros Vieira, *O protestantismo, a magomaria e a questão religiosa no Brasil*, Brasília, Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1980.
47. Cf. Jaider Batista da Silva on [www.metodistarecumenico.blogspot.com/2006/08/carta-para-o-bispo-adonias.html](http://www.metodistarecumenico.blogspot.com/2006/08/carta-para-o-bispo-adonias.html) (21 September 2006). There is an ongoing discussion on this blog, to which the bishop mentioned above has himself contributed.
48. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, The Lutheran World Federation and The Roman Catholic Church, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 2000.
49. CNBB, Mensagem à Igreja Metodista, 23 August, 2006, [www.cnb.org.br/index.php?op=pagina&chaveid=241a071](http://www.cnb.org.br/index.php?op=pagina&chaveid=241a071) (26 October 2006), (translation mine).
50. Cf. Rubem César Fernandes et alii, *Novo Nascimento: Os Evangelhos em Casa, na Igreja e na Política*, Rio de Janeiro, Mauad, 1998.
51. Carlos Fernandes and Luciana Mazzarelli, "Igrejas para todos os gostos: expansão do movimento evangélico gera denominações com nomes exóticos", in *Edição* 8/91, July 2003, pp.44-49. A long, but far from complete list of church names published in 2003 features denominations like "C.F.B. Church" (Curtain Pull of Blessings), "Evangelical Pentecostal Church the Last Shipment to Christ", "Automotive Church of the Sacred Fire", "Church of the Cross set up for the Good of Souls", "Evangelical Pentecostal Church Spirit of Christ", "Assemblies of God with Doctrine and no Customs", "Church of the Quick Revelation" and so on. There are even names as absurd as "Evangelical Muslim Church Javé is Father" or "National Christian Evangelical Spiritist Church".
52. [www.cursodepastor.com.br](http://www.cursodepastor.com.br) (27/09/2006). At the same time, there is a growing interest for a Bachelor's degree recognized by the Brazilian Ministry of Education, which can be obtained by studying in one of the 75 authorized seminary courses or, for those who already have a so-called "free" degree (with
- a sound curriculum), a number of seminaries and faculties can offer complementation to obtain the recognized Bachelor of Theology.
53. *Batismo, Eucaristia e Ministério: Convergência da fé* (1984), 3rd ed., São Paulo, EGNIC, KOINONIA, ASTE, 2001; *A Confissão da Fé Apostólica: Explicação Esmética da Fé Apostólica segundo o Credo Niceno-Constantinopolitano* (381), São Paulo, CONIC, Ciências da Religião, 1993; *Unidade preciosa: Uma consulta do Conselho Mundial de Igrejas sobre Koinonia e Justiça, Paz e Integridade da Criação*, Porto Alegre, CONIC, 1993; *Um Tesouro em Vasos de Argila: Instrumento para uma reflexão ecumênica sobre a hermenêutica*, Faith and Order Paper No. 182, São Paulo, Paulus/CONIC, 2000; *Compartilhando a fé comum: guia de estudos e celebração da fé para grupos de reflexão*, São Paulo, Paulinas, CONIC, 2005.
54. *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 181, Geneva, WCC/Faith and Order, 1998.
55. Consulta de Fé e Constituição – São Leopoldo, 1 a 5 de julho de 2004, p.2, (translation mine).
56. Rudolf von Sinner, "A Time of Challenge and Sharing. The Ecumenical Congress on Mission and Ecumenism in Latin America", in *The Ecumenical Review*, *op. cit.*, vol. 58, 3-4, July/October 2006, pp. 280-286; in this paragraph, we are using freely elements from this publication. Texts presented at the Congress are available in English, together with other information, at [www.est.com.br/congresso\\_ecumenico\\_2006/inl](http://www.est.com.br/congresso_ecumenico_2006/inl) (25/09/2006).
57. Cf. their respective texts on the Congress' website. See also Rudolf von Sinner, *Trust and convivência*. Contributions to a Hermeneutics of Trust in Communal Interaction", in *The Ecumenical Review*, *op. cit.*, vol. 57/3, 2005, pp.322-341.
58. As a very valuable example, cf. Juan Sepúlveda's brief study *The Andean Highlands: an Encounter with Two Forms of Christianity*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1997). Sepúlveda is a Pentecostal theologian from Chile and has been involved many times in ecumenical meetings.
59. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, *op. cit.*, §61.
60. *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: an Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics*, ed. by Peter Bouteneff and Dagmar Heller, Faith and Order Paper No. 182, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1998, *Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. by Peter Bouteneff and Dagmar Heller, Faith and Order Paper No. 189, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2001, pp.111-121; Rudolf von Sinner, *Kein vom dreieinigen Gott in Brasilien und Indien: Grundzüge einer ökumenischen Hermeneutik im Dialog mit Leonardo Boff und Raimon Panikkar*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2003.
61. Cf. *Called to One Hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures*, ed. by Christopher

- Duraisingh, Geneva, WCC, 1998; S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Gospel and Culture: An Ongoing Discussion within the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, WCC, 1994.
62. *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, op. cit., §61.
63. Cf. Antonio Carlos Teles da Silva, *Os origens do movimento ecumênico na Amazônia paraense*, unpublished Master's thesis, São Leopoldo, Lutheran School of Theology, 2005.
64. A recent study, which we hope will soon be translated into English, retrieves the memory of Freire's Genevan period: Balduino A. Andreola and Mario Bueno Ribeiro, *Andarilho da esperança: Paulo Freire no Conselho Mundial de Igrejas*, São Paulo: ASTE, 2005.
65. Cf. the respective sites: [www.cese.org.br](http://www.cese.org.br); [www.koinonia.org.br](http://www.koinonia.org.br); [www.cccar.org](http://www.cccar.org). On the latter, see the recent Master's thesis of José Carlos Stoffel, *Ecumenismo de Justiça: reflexão e prática*, São Leopoldo, Oikos, 2006. An excellent overview on these and similar organizations joined together in the Brazilian Ecumenical Forum has been published recently in a brochure with Portuguese/English parallel version for the IX Assembly of the WCC: *Ecumenism, human rights and peace: The experience of the Brazilian Ecumenical Forum*, ed. by Rafael Soares de Oliveira, Rio de Janeiro, Koinonia Presença Ecumênica e Serviço, 2006.
66. *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, op. cit., §114.
67. Op. cit., §115.
68. Op. cit., §116.
69. It has to be noted that, while the bishop insists on the weight of new "versions" of Christianity rather than the traditional confessional boundaries, he attributes this moral decay uniquely to the "Western churches of the Reformation"; cf. *EUROPÁICA*: Bulletin of the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions, n° 46 of 16th August, 2004. Since this statement was made at the Faith and Order Plenary Commission Meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2004, Bishop Hilarion has repeatedly affirmed his opinion including at the IX Assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre, Brazil.
70. Leonardo Boff has been a pioneer in this matter, see, for instance: "Social Ecology: Poverty and Misery", in *Ecology: voices from South and North*, ed. by David G. Hallman, Geneva, WCC, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1994, pp.235-247.
71. Cf. Olav Fykse Tveit, *Mutual Accountability as Ecumenical Attitude: A Study in Ecumenical Ecclesiology Based on Faith and Order Texts 1948-1998*, (unpublished doctoral thesis), Oslo, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, 2001. On Bonino, see especially pp.209-214.

## Ecclesiology and Ethics – An Example of Global-Local Dynamics

Rev. Dr Martin Robra

### 1. BEM's impact on a local congregation in Germany

I would like to begin this article by sharing my experience as a pastor in a local congregation in Germany as it sought to respond to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM). The Protestant Church of Heven is a parish in the Ruhr valley of the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Families of persons working in a steel plant, a glass factory, and other enterprises of the steel industry belong to the parish, together with teachers and students of the nearby University of Bochum. This is one of the many parishes of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia (EKvW).<sup>1</sup> The congregation was definitely *changed* by the process of receiving BEM, which took place in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup>

Called to respond to the text by the leadership of the church, the church council of every local parish of the EKvW discussed BEM and shared its own response with the synod of the church circuit, which studied all of the responses and forwarded its synthesis to the theological commission of the synod of the church. The synod amended and finally endorsed the official response of the EKvW in 1985 and sent it both to the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and to the World Council of Churches (WCC).<sup>3</sup>



Accompanied by the "Lima Liturgy", BEM had an impact not only on the theological understanding of baptism, eucharist and ministry, but also on the concrete ways in which the congregations celebrated the Lord's supper and looked at the role of the minister in all aspects of worship, witness and service of the church. As did the whole church of Westphalia, the parish in Heven revisited its stance concerning the baptism of children and adults, and introduced a special blessing of those children whose baptism their parents decided to postpone.<sup>4</sup> Celebrating the Lima liturgy, the parish began to look at the trinitarian dimension of the eucharist and gave new emphasis to *anamnesis* and *epiclexis*, together with other elements of the Lima liturgy in its own worship life. The link between "*lex orandi, lex credendi*" – so we pray, so we believe – proved to be relevant also for this congregation.

BEM provoked a discussion on underlying hermeneutical principles and ecclesiology. An intense debate focused on the relationship between Holy Scripture and the Tradition and traditions of the church. The congregation was one of the United Churches in Germany, but had its origins in the Lutheran tradition. Clearly, the canon of the Bible was a result of decisions taken by the early church. There was no doubt about this – but what were the implications for the *sola scriptura* principle so vital to the Reformation? Could we continue to juxtapose Scripture and Tradition as we used to? Another question concerned the order and structures of the church: was it really sufficient to refer constantly to article VII of the *Confessio Augustana*,<sup>5</sup> which pointed to the right preaching of the word and the right celebration of baptism and the Lord's supper as decisive marks of the church? Had not the struggle of the confessing church taught us that the way in which authority, *episkopé*, was exercised in the church was indeed ecclesologically significant?

Of special importance to the congregation, however, were those passages of BEM that articulated the link between ecclesiology and ethics, worship and witness of the church. The congregation focused on an active witness for peace and reconciliation across the "iron

curtain" in Europe. It made the engagement for social justice locally, nationally and internationally between North and South, together with the concern for the whole of God's creation, priorities of its life and work. But it did not want to reduce its theological engagement in taking on an activist stance. Thus it struggled to make a theological grounding of its public witness, and to keep that witness rooted in its worship life. Therefore, how BEM addressed the ethical significance of baptism and eucharist found special attention:

As they grow in the Christian life of faith, baptized believers demonstrate that humanity can be regenerated and liberated. They have a common responsibility, here and now, to bear witness together to the Gospel of Christ, the Liberator of all human beings. The context of this common witness is the Church and the world. Within a fellowship of witness and service, Christians discover the full significance of the one baptism as the gift of God to all God's people. Likewise, they acknowledge that baptism, as a baptism into Christ's death, has ethical implications which not only call for personal sanctification, but also motivate Christians to strive for the realization of the will of God in all realms of life (Rom. 6:9ff; Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Peter 2:21-4:6).<sup>6</sup>

The eucharist embraces all aspects of life. It is a representative act of thanksgiving and offering on behalf of the whole world. The eucharist celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life (Matt. 5:23f; 1 Cor. 10:16f; 1 Cor. 11:20-22; Gal. 3:28). All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ. Through the eucharist the all-renewing

grace of God penetrates and restores human personality and dignity. The eucharist involves the believer in the central event of the world's history. As participants in the eucharist, therefore, we prove inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this ongoing restoration of the world's situation and the human condition. The eucharist shows us that our behaviour is inconsistent in face of the reconciling presence of God in human history: we are placed under continual judgment by the persistence of unjust relationships of all kinds in our society, the manifold divisions on account of human pride, materialist interests and power politics and, above all, the obstinacy of unjustifiable confessional oppositions within the body of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The texts reminded the church council of Barmen II, the second thesis of the 1934 Barmen Declaration of the *confessing church*, which underlined obedience to Jesus in all realms of life.<sup>8</sup> The Barmen Declaration is included in the collection of confessional texts of the EKVW in order to make sure that lessons of the German church struggle are not forgotten, but are valued as formative experience by the church and indeed as a response to the Holy Spirit maintaining the truth of the gospel throughout the challenges and changes of history.

BEM helped to move towards deeper "mutual recognition" between those who were concerned about Bible and worship as the centre of all life of the parish, and those who insisted on public witness and service. They all agreed that participation in the Easter peace marches, in protests against the closure of a steel plant, or in fundraising campaigns for the mission and development agencies of the churches were seen and understood as forms of the mission and witness of the parish. The BEM texts offered language to bridge these different emphases of the individual faith of the members of the congregation.

Last but not least, studying the BEM document encouraged the congregation to see its close cooperation with the local Roman

Catholic Church not just in terms of greater efficiency and common voice, but as an expression of the desired unity in Christ.

## 2. From Church and World to Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation?

Such interest in the links between church and world, or the being of the church and its public witness and service, was obviously growing also in the Faith and Order movement at the global level. But this was not the only place. A decisive moment was reached at the 6th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1983 in Vancouver. The assembly affirmed that:

the aspect of Christian unity which has been most striking to us here in Vancouver is that of a eucharistic vision. Christ – the life of the world – unites heaven and earth, God and world, spiritual and secular.<sup>10</sup>

The "eucharistic vision" provided the basis for the *Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*.<sup>11</sup>

As a next step, Faith and Order intensified its work on the Church and World study.<sup>12</sup> The design of the study included a series of consultations on the overarching themes of the *Church as mystery and prophetic sign*, on the *Search for Justice*, and the *Community of Women and Men*. The section of the report that tackles issues of Unity and Renewal and the Search for Justice<sup>13</sup> refers explicitly to BEM, "Eucharist", §20, and points to reflections on "the very structure of the eucharist as a witness for justice and unity both within and without the church" by the Melbourne World Mission Conference in 1980:

the welcome – irrespective of race, class and gender; the forgiveness – being freed from the past for the future;

the peace – being right with God, each other and the creation; – the sharing – the right use of resources.”<sup>14</sup>

This was taken up by the World Conference on Faith and Order in 1993 in Santiago de Compostela, which declared:

The Church as *koïnomia* is called to share not only in the suffering of its *own* community but in the suffering of all; by advocacy and care for the poor, needy, and marginalized; by joining in all efforts for justice and peace within human societies; by exercising and promoting responsible stewardship of creation and by keeping alive hope in the heart of humanity. *Diakonia* to the whole world and *koïnomia* cannot be separated.<sup>15</sup>

These thoughts were further developed in the Ecclesiology and Ethics study of the WCC.<sup>16</sup> The study concluded that churches not only “have” an ethic, or take positions on ethical issues, but “are an ethic”, in the sense that ethical engagement is intrinsic to the very being of church. Furthermore, it dared to take the further step of insisting that *ecumenical* ethical engagement is intrinsic to the church. In light of this conclusion, it raised the question whether any particular church can be “fully church” if it is not engaged ecumenically, with other churches, in wrestling with the burning ethical issues of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Those impulses were taken up in the WCC by both Faith and Order and the Justice, Peace, Creation (JPC) team. In its work on economic globalization, the JPC team invited a group of theologians from various confessional backgrounds to reflect on the ecclesial entry-points for addressing issues of economic justice and the ecology. This group stated in the communiqué of one of its meetings:

The church's preaching and the celebration of the sacraments can be compromised when we are complicit in systemic injustices and the exploitation of life. We

realize how the *eucharist*, rightly understood and practised, embodies and enacts reconciled and just relationships and a foretaste of fulfilled life for all in community. Whenever the *eucharist* is celebrated without regard for its transformative power, its integrity and potential is denied. In a similar way, the language of *covenant*, *communion* and *confession* are to remind us of the need to work for the transformation of distorted relationships and life-threatening processes. Without this, their language is rendered meaningless. From this perspective, engaging in clarity, critique, alternatives, and practical action is not adiabaphorous but integral to the church's very being and witness.<sup>18</sup>

The study on “Ecclesiology and Ethics” had given special attention to questions of formation and “malformation” of, and by, the churches in their encounters with the public world.<sup>19</sup> The cases mentioned in the concluding third report of the study were apartheid and moral failure in the face of ethnic violence and warfare between nation-states. Soon after the 1998 Harare Assembly, Faith and Order and JPC continued to explore these concerns with a study on “Ethnic Identity, National Identity and the Search for the Unity of the Church” with a focus on churches in situations of conflict.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Local self-studies – a method to link global and local more intentionally

Special features of this study were an interdisciplinary approach and a series of local self-studies, organized by councils of churches or other types of church-related bodies. Local self-studies which contributed to the study process were carried out in Fiji, Sudan, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka and the USA. They all addressed a common set of questions. Intentionally the local-global dynamics

were addressed in their relevance for the ecumenical engagement and common witness by churches in conflict situations.<sup>21</sup>

The combination of local self-studies and the interdisciplinary approach was very helpful in producing a summary of the study that is meant to equip churches to understand the role of ethnic and national identity in their own lives, in their relationship as churches, and in their own societies. The document underlines:

While the study is addressed in the first instance to churches in situations of tensions and overt conflict, nevertheless every church could benefit from a fresh look at the issues which it raises. How does our baptismal unity in Christ relate to the present divisions among the churches? How does our common belonging to Christ relate to the links, for good or ill, between churches and particular human communities and institutions? How can churches in situations of tension or conflict work together to promote reconciliation, justice and healing? These questions go to the heart of our faith, and our understanding of the nature of the church.

A church or a local congregation may wish to begin the study process on its own; but as soon as practicable *the process should be undertaken by the churches ecumenically*. The process itself will be an expression of the churches' mutual accountability to one another, and to their common Lord who has set them, together, to witness in that place.<sup>22</sup>

The analysis of situations of conflict in the study had been based upon the notion of ethnic, national, tribal or racial constructions of identity. The study states:

Such identity markers are powerful motivators in situations in which groups seek for power and resources at the expense of others. In baptism Christians are incorporated into Christ, and this identity marker takes

precedence over all others, which may then be celebrated in their turn... One of the great steps forward in the response of the churches to God's gift of unity has been a common recognition of each other's baptism. Such a sign of unity needs the witness of the local churches as a celebration of the sign of the unity of humankind.<sup>23</sup>

The study also stressed such efforts as an expression of the churches' fellowship, or *koinonia*, in each place and through conciliar relationships in different places in common recognition of each other's baptism and in common witness to the world:

The local churches, in making visible the unity which God has given, are a sign of God's mission to create for God's self one new humanity, a sign to those entangled in ethnic and national conflicts. The local churches, in making their unity visible, are a prophetic sign that challenges and judges the manner in which conflicts have been created and continue. The local churches are an effective prophetic sign in order that situations of conflict may be ameliorated, healed and reconciled.<sup>24</sup>

Considered from another angle, the deep divisions of local churches along ethnic, national or racial lines betray the gospel and are deep wounds in the one body of Christ. This underlines the ecclesiological urgency – and ecumenical imperative – to address these wounds in participating in God's mission of reconciliation for the churches and the world at local and global levels ecumenically.

In such a way, the reception of BEM is not exclusively linked to an explicit response to the text produced. The goal and purpose of BEM can be furthered and grow among the churches in many other ways. But it is important to link these efforts in all fields to the search for visible unity so that all are conscious expressions of the search for visible unity as a divine gift and calling, a search for the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one

eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation.<sup>25</sup>

## NOTES

1. In 1985, the church had about 3.6 million members in 1667 congregations.
2. "Reception" of an "ecumenical convergence text" is here understood as the conscious effort by a church or a local congregation to engage with the results of an ecumenical dialogue or study process in order to arrive at a deeper common understanding of the fellowship of churches and the unity that is given in Christ.
3. The full text of the response is documented in *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vol. IV, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Paper No. 137, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1987, pp. 137-153.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
5. *Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 6. Auflage, 1967, p. 61.
6. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982, "Baptism", §10.
7. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, "Eucharist", §20.
8. H.-G. Geyer et al., *Zum politischen Auftrag der christlichen Gemeinde (Barmen II)*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1974.
9. This title refers to the series of Faith and Order Studies on the link between ecclesiology and ethics, partly undertaken in close cooperation with the Justice, Peace and Creation Team, beginning with *Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community*, Faith and Order Paper No. 151, 2nd revised printing, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1990, via the *Ecclesiology and Ethics* study to results of the study on *Ethnic Identity, National Identity and the Search for the Unity of the Church*, published under the title *Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation: A Resource for Churches in Situations of Conflict*, Faith and Order Paper No. 201, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2006. It should not be forgotten that already at the Faith and Order meeting in 1971 in Louvain the question was raised on what it meant that the Christ of the eucharist was the same Christ who identifies with the least and marginalized in the community – see *Anhaltspunkte für die Diskussion in den Sektionen der Kommission für Glaube und Kirchenverfassung 1971 in Löwen*, zitiert nach Ernst Lange, *Die ökumenische Utopie*

- der Was beugt die ökumenische Bewegung?, München, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 2nd edition, 1986 (1st edition 1972), p. 206.
10. *Gathered for Life: The Official Report of the Sixth Assembly, Vancouver, 1983*, ed. by David Gill, Geneva, World Council of Churches and Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1983, p. 44.
  11. Cf. Margot Kaessmann, *Die eucharistische Vision*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1992.
  12. *Church and World: the Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community*, Faith and Order Paper No. 151, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1990.
  13. *Church and World*, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-49.
  14. *Ibid.*, p. 48; cf. the report of the Melbourne World Mission Conference, *Your Kingdom Come*, Geneva: WCC/CWME, 1980, pp. 205-206.
  15. *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, ed. by Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann, Faith and Order Paper No. 166, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1994, §38, p. 275 – a statement from earlier drafts was already included in the report of the first consultation of the *Ecclesiology and Ethics* Study in 1993 in Rønde, Denmark, cf. *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1997, p. 3 – also BEM, "Eucharist", §20, is quoted there.
  16. See especially the section on *Eucharist, Covenant and Ethical Engagement*, in *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 36ff.
  17. See also Duncan Forrester, *The True Church and Morality: Reflections on Ecclesiology and Ethics*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1997, and Lewis S. Mudge, *The Church as Moral Community: Ecclesiology and Ethics in Ecumenical Debate*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, New York, Continuum, 1998.
  18. Carrigny II communiqué, WCC, January 2003.
  19. *Ecclesiology and Ethics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 61ff.
  20. Cf. *Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation: A Resource for Churches in Situations of Conflict*, *op. cit.*
  21. *Ibid.*, pp. 6ff. The case study from Fiji is a very well developed and documented example: *Ethnicity, National Identity & Church Unity. A study on Fiji 2001*, Suva, Citizens Constitutional Forum, 2001.
  22. *Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation: A Resource for Churches in Situations of Conflict*, *op. cit.*, pp. 2ff.
  23. *Ibid.*, pp. 59ff.
  24. *Ibid.*, pp. 60.
  25. *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report, Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991*, ed. by Michael Kinnamon, Geneva, WCC Publications and Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1991, 2.1.



## *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry in Bilateral Dialogues*

Rev. Jaakko Rusaama

### *1. The nature of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*

On its web page the World Council of Churches (WCC) states that it regards the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document (BEM) as the most widely-distributed and studied ecumenical document. In the WCC's view BEM has been "a basis for many 'mutual recognition' agreements among churches and remains a reference today". It is not difficult to agree with this assessment.

To answer the question of how BEM has been reflected in the bilateral dialogues would require a survey on several aspects of the modern ecumenical movement. Several major studies, and hundreds of articles, have been published world-wide on the profound impact which BEM has had on the ecumenical movement and on relations among churches. BEM has not been an isolated project of the Faith and Order Commission, but an integral part within the many processes which the churches have pursued in trying to express Christian unity. There has been interaction on several levels within the ecumenical movement. Major national and international bilaterals have taken place before, during and after the adoption of BEM. Therefore, it must be seen in the light of an ongoing process

within which the convergence text from Lima has had both a theological and a spiritual impact.

The Lima text may be seen more specifically in the context of the Faith and Order movement and the work of the Faith and Order Commission from the early 20th century;<sup>1</sup> of the inter-church discussions within the World Council of Churches after the Second World War; and also in the context of national, regional and wider conversations which the churches have conducted with each other on a variety of issues.

In the Preface of BEM it is acknowledged briefly that baptism, eucharist and ministry had been investigated in many ecumenical dialogues, both bilateral and multilateral. The bilateral dialogues proved to be complementary and mutually beneficial; the Faith and Order Commission, in its own multilateral considerations, then built upon the specific findings of the bilateral conversations. All these factors paved the way for a process which was further accelerated in the responses which the churches and ecumenical organizations prepared when responding to the Lima convergence text.

At the WCC's Vancouver Assembly in 1983 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Robert Runcie, expressed his gratitude to the WCC for the essential role it had played in bilateral conversations and the BEM process. It was also significant that Metropolitan Chrysostomos, representing the Ecumenical Patriarchate, warmly welcomed the Assembly Report on BEM-related issues, entitled "Taking steps towards unity". The intention and quest in BEM were for "common understanding of the apostolic faith". The Vancouver Assembly listed three requirements for this:

First, a common recognition of the apostolic faith as expressed in creeds of the undivided Church such as the Apostolic Symbol and especially the Nicene Creed; second, a common explication of the faith so recognized in terms understandable today; and third, a common confession by the churches today of that same apostolic

faith in relation to the contemporary challenges to the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

Similar positive sentiments were expressed at the Faith and Order Commission meeting in 1989,<sup>3</sup> at the WCC Canberra Assembly in 1991 in Pope John Paul II's message to the Assembly, and in the Assembly reports.<sup>4</sup> They were also expressed by the Director of the Secretariat of the Faith and Order Commission, Dr Günther Gassmann, at the Faith and Order World Conference in 1993: "BEM has become an ecumenical reference text which is evoked in bilateral conversations and negotiations between churches."<sup>5</sup> And at the WCC's Harare Assembly in 1998 the Moderator of the Central Committee, the Catholicos of Cilicia, Aram I, asked if the churches were courageous enough to recognize mutual baptism as a concrete step forward in "our common search for full and visible unity".<sup>6</sup>

In this article I will briefly highlight some ways in which BEM has affected mutual agreements – or rather efforts to achieve agreements – as seen in the light of bilateral dialogues. The relationship between BEM and the bilateral dialogues was aptly dealt with, by Metropolitan Emilianos and Max Thurian at the Fourth Forum on Bilateral Conversations in 1985, and in the subsequent report from the Forum (Faith and Order Paper No 125, 1985). In the following I try to avoid duplicating these views.

## 2. Multilateral and bilateral talks

Both before and after its publication BEM has been a multilateral process which has affected both multilateral and bilateral talks between the churches. In general it can be assumed that the churches, or specific denominations, feel that they are better and more correctly understood in bilateral dialogues than in a wide multilateral context.<sup>7</sup> However, in both cases the principle of convergence has played a crucial role. It has been an instrument

which has been differently interpreted but has, in practice, been used for inspiring the dialogues.

Shortly after the publication of BEM and, in the light of the then ongoing dialogues, Faith and Order Director Günther Gassmann felt encouraged to say that multilateral and bilateral conversations – as different forms of ecumenical endeavour – rendered a contribution to the advancement of closer fellowship between the churches “on their way to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship”.<sup>8</sup>

The pattern in church encounters developed fairly rapidly from the 1970s onwards, from multilateral to bilateral dialogues. This apparent shift in emphasis was duly recognized at the WCC Canberra Assembly in 1991. Yet the Assembly Reference Committee, in its report, somewhat surprisingly claimed that bilateral and multilateral dialogues used to be held primarily in emergency situations.<sup>9</sup> This is hardly the whole truth if we take a closer look at the *raison d'être* of the bilaterals.

It must be noted that each bilateral dialogue has been different. The clear intention has been to create better mutual understanding between the partners involved. At the Fifth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues in 1991 it was recognized that each dialogue was marked by the particular history of the partners, the experience of communion they once enjoyed, the issues that divided them and their different methodological presuppositions.<sup>10</sup> Also the goals of the dialogues have been expressed differently. We find definitions related to ecclesial communion (in “Church as Communion”<sup>11</sup>), removing past condemnations, achieving visible unity, church fellowship, realizing a communion of communions, or a common witness and mission in the world. The goals of the dialogues have been expressed for instance in the notions of:

“full communion” (Anglican-Lutheran; Anglican-Roman Catholic)

“full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life” (Methodist-Roman Catholic)

“full liturgical-canonical communion” (Old Catholic-Orthodox)  
 “restoration of full communion between these two churches” (Orthodox-Roman Catholic)  
 “full unity and communion” (Orthodox-Oriental Orthodox)

In some dialogues the goal is expressed in more far-reaching terms:

“to investigate differences that have been handed down in divergent ways in the two churches” (Anglican-Oriental Orthodox)  
 “to set in motion a conversation and encounter which would encourage Baptists and Reformed in different situations to take in hand the furtherance and concrete shaping of this dialogue with regard to their own particular situation” (Baptist-Reformed)  
 “[to] outline our present view of former condemnations, support ways of overcoming present difficulties and recommend ways to improve mutual knowledge, respect and cooperation between our churches” (Baptist-Lutheran)  
 “to develop a climate of mutual understanding in matters of faith and practice, to find points of genuine agreement as well as to indicate areas in which further dialogue is required” (Pentecostal-Roman Catholic)

It is interesting that in practically all the dialogues discussions have moved towards questions of ecclesiology.<sup>12</sup>

A study of the responses by churches to BEM, and the same churches’ discussions in bilateral dialogues, would reveal a certain amount of progress, not only in methodology but also in their own efforts to clarify their doctrinal stands *vis-à-vis* their bilateral partner. This confirms the assumption that BEM – as part of a decades-long multilateral process – has paved the way significantly

for fresh approaches between the churches, whether nationally, regionally or globally.

A general view of the bilaterals shows how active the churches have been in this field. A more detailed view of specific dialogues, both geographically and thematically, would increase the list described here. In addition, the multilateral dialogues would shed further light on the impact of BEM in church relations. Well documented bilaterals have taken place already from the 1930s between major denominations and individual churches. Recent documentation includes encounters on different levels between the following denominations:

- Adventists-Lutheran
- Anglican-Baptist
- Anglican-Methodist
- Anglican-Lutheran
- Anglican-Old Catholic
- Anglican-Eastern Orthodox
- Anglican-Oriental Orthodox
- Anglican-Moravian
- Anglican-Protestant (especially the Meissen and Reuilly reports)
- Anglican-Reformed
- Anglican-Roman Catholic
- Assyrian Church of the East-Roman Catholic
- Baptist-Lutheran
- Baptist-Mennonites
- Baptist-Reformed
- Baptist-Roman Catholic
- Disciples of Christ-Reformed
- Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic
- Eastern Orthodox-Oriental Orthodox
- Eastern Orthodox-Reformed
- Eastern Orthodox-Roman Catholic
- Evangelical-Eastern Orthodox

- Evangelical-Roman Catholic
- Lutheran-Methodist
- Lutheran-Mennonites
- Lutheran-Orthodox
- Lutheran-Pentecostal
- Lutheran-Reformed
- Lutheran-Roman Catholic
- Mennonite-Reformed
- Methodist-Reformed
- Methodist-Roman Catholic
- Old Catholic-Eastern Orthodox
- Old Catholic-Roman Catholic
- Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic
- Pentecostal-Roman Catholic
- Reformed-Oriental Orthodox
- Reformed-Roman Catholic

A few examples may highlight how the three issues dealt with in BEM (baptism, eucharist and ministry) have also been dealt with in some major dialogues. I will concentrate only on some direct references to the Lima text and related issues. (In ecumenical theological work nationally, regionally and on the world level the many different methodologies and factors easily obscure the significance of BEM. Therefore it may be justified to concentrate solely on direct references).

The Anglican Communion has played a major role within the modern ecumenical movement, an active and constructive role which is seen in the BEM process and has continued since the publication of the Lima text. The Lambeth Conference in 1988 warmly endorsed BEM, stating that Anglicans could draw "important consequences" from BEM for their relations with other churches, "particularly with those churches which also recognize the text as an expression of the apostolic faith". The emphasis on apostolic faith is significant here. Encouraged by the BEM process, Anglican bishops also urged the Faith and Order Commission to

resume its work on structures of authority and decision-making in order that the work of the bilateral dialogues might be seen in a broader context.<sup>13</sup>

In the Anglican-Methodist discussions (e.g. between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain, which ended in the Covenant signed in 2003), the Church of England affirms a number of doctrinal statements which it has endorsed in various ways. Among these is the Lima text, which was acknowledged by the General Synod "to be consonant with the faith of Anglicans".<sup>14</sup> The Methodists do not here make any reference to the Lima text, though their official response to it was very positive. Behind the covenant between these churches there is naturally the wide theological agreement which goes back to the two churches' common roots. In their bilateral discussions these churches recognize each other as being a part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The Anglican-Methodist Covenant emphasizes the apostolic tradition and states that the apostolic continuity of the Church is located in its faithfulness to the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles.<sup>15</sup> The churches reinforce the Lima text on Ministry:

witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each.<sup>16</sup>

The Anglican-(Eastern) Orthodox international theological dialogue began in 1973. The first phase ended with an Agreed Statement in 1976 (Moscow) which included sections on Scripture and Tradition, the *filioque* clause of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Church as the eucharistic community. The second phase faced difficulties, as the question of the ordination of women in the Anglican Communion was becoming a reality. The Orthodox

raised serious doubts as to further ecclesial endeavours between the two communions. However, the second phase of the dialogue was started in 1980, continued alongside the final Faith and Order process towards BEM, and was concluded in the Dublin Agreed Statement in 1984.

This text concentrated on the mystery of the Church, including questions of intercommunion; faith and the Trinity (including the *filioque* clause); and worship and Tradition, including the question of the veneration of icons. In Dublin the representatives of the churches concentrated on ecclesiology, stating that the church, as the Body of Christ, is seen as the first-fruits of humanity drawn into the divine life. Through the grace it receives, the church bears witness to the hope of God's reign over the whole of creation. The three themes in the Dublin Agreed Statement deal with the mystery of the church; faith in the Trinity, prayer and holiness; and worship and Tradition.<sup>17</sup> On this line the notions of "foretaste" and "mystery" were discussed in several other dialogues, for example in the Anglican-Reformed and Orthodox-Roman Catholic.

It is noteworthy that in discussing church structures several dialogues have been able to explore the question of the Petrine Office as a potential for focusing and symbolizing the unity and continuity of the church. This aspect was obvious in the dialogues where the Roman Catholic Church was involved, such as with the Anglicans (ARCIC II), Lutherans and Methodists; but the issue was also on the agenda of the Anglican-Orthodox Dublin talks. Regarding these, it took a while before the third phase of the conversations could be started between the Anglican and the Orthodox; but in 1989 the two confessional bodies resumed their talks and concentrated on, among other issues, ecclesiology and the doctrine of the ordained ministry of the Church.<sup>18</sup>

For the Protestant churches in general not only the BEM process but the whole modern ecumenical movement has been extremely significant, as they have tried to articulate their confessional roles in light of the biblical and early church tradition



– and in face of ecumenical challenges, coming especially from the major Eastern and Western churches.

Among the Protestant churches themselves, ecumenical activities have been impressive. In several countries, encouraged by the BEM process, churches have entered into bilateral discussion. For example in Finland the large majority church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, began talks in 1982 with the Evangelical Free Church; a few years later with the Pentecostal movement; and finally, in 1989, also with the Orthodox Church. All these national conversations had a pioneering impact, since practically the only official encounters before then had taken place in some local events and within the framework of the national council of churches. These talks still continue, and new series of discussions in Finland have been started between Lutherans and Baptists, and Lutherans and Methodists.

As another example, on behalf of the Baptists the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) has held theological conversations for more than 20 years with the Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Mennonite Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Roman Catholic Church. Preliminary discussions have been held with the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate, and plans have been made for talks with the Methodists and the Pentecostal churches. BWA General Secretary Dr Denton Lotz has regarded bilateral conversations not as “a hindrance, but an encouragement to faithful Christian witness and mission. ... Theological conversations are not for the purpose of compromise, but for clarification and mutual edification.”<sup>19</sup>

The first in a new series of Baptist-Roman Catholic theological conversations was held in December 2006. This is a continuation of previous talks with the Roman Catholic Church through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 1990, and a follow-up visit by the BWA to the Vatican. Topics discussed included the authority of Christ in Scripture and Tradition, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and Hearing the Word of

God in the contemporary context. As an earlier report on the conversations noted, these may lead to “further action together on ethical issues, including justice, peace and the sanctity of life, in accord with God's purpose and to the praise of God's glory”.<sup>20</sup> The conversations continue and are planned to conclude in 2010.

### 3. BEM and the bilaterals

The three issues baptism, eucharist and ministry have been discussed extensively in many dialogues, either referring directly to the BEM process or because the dialogue partners felt that these needed treatment, or offered possibilities for progress. In some dialogues – depending on the convergence process with the dialogue partner – only one of the three issues has been seen as relevant. Very poignantly all three issues have been discussed in the Anglican-Reformed dialogue, as seen in *God's Reign and Our Unity* (1984).<sup>21</sup> Let us now look more closely at each of these three issues in turn.

#### *Baptism*

As a starting point one may assume that the churches have different theologies, understandings, interpretations and practices of baptism. The Anglican Bishops at their Lambeth Conference in 1988 noted the need to take up the theology and practice of baptism with those who practise only believers' baptism.<sup>22</sup> BEM observes that the broken witness of the Church is manifested in the inability of the churches mutually to recognize their various practices of baptism. Accordingly, baptism has mostly been discussed in those bilateral dialogues where one of the partners practises baptism only on personal profession of faith.<sup>23</sup>

In the Anglican-Reformed dialogue the churches admitted that there had been different practices in both churches; one reason for raising the issue was the question of a second baptism, on the

ground that the first baptism (received as an infant) had not been valid. The churches jointly stated that, on the one hand, the situation was "a summons to re-examine our baptismal discipline and the care given to the Christian nurture of those baptized as infants"; and, on the other hand, they reiterated that "the call for a second baptism rests on a failure to understand that baptism is primarily the work of God in Christ".<sup>24</sup>

In the Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic dialogue of 1977-1981 baptism was thoroughly discussed, concentrating on the relation between personal faith and baptism, and on the mode of baptism. Though the churches openly expressed their differing views on believers' baptism and infant baptism, and also on the practice of immersion, they were able to affirm the mutual recognition of baptism administered by both churches, "convinced that the oneness we received by the grace of God in baptism must find its completion in visible ecclesial unity".<sup>25</sup>

In the Anglican-Methodist Covenant of 2003 the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain expressed ecumenical convergence and recognized each other's baptisms. The churches note that they responded positively to the section of BEM that deals with baptism, and that there are no significant differences of theological understanding between them regarding baptism. Significantly, they recognize that BEM's scriptural imagery of baptism is reflected in the initiation liturgies of both churches. The question of infant baptism and believers' baptism does not seem to cause problems; the churches simply state that they "baptize infants and young children and will baptize adult candidates of any age". However, the churches refer cautiously to some exceptions: "Both churches include loyal members who have hesitated to have their children baptized before they are able to profess the Christian faith for themselves."<sup>26</sup> The churches in this dialogue state:

We affirm that in both our churches the word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist are duly administered and celebrated.

In the Covenant commitments, Anglicans and Methodists declared:

We commit ourselves to continue to welcome each other's baptized members to participate in the fellowship, worship and mission of our churches.

Looking only at the question of infant baptism and believers' baptism, it is clear that there is still much work to be done *within* the churches, even as they enter into dialogue with others. One may ask what kind of rethinking is taking place in the Baptist and Pentecostal churches. The Baptist World Alliance in its Centenary Congress in 2005 affirmed that:

Believers' baptism by immersion is the biblical way to publicly declare discipleship for those who have repented of sin and come to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Here lies one of the characteristics of many bilateral dialogues. The confessional tradition of a given church is presented in fixed formulas or documents – but is then actively interpreted when challenged by the dialogue partner. Then the question arises: how coherent and consistent can (or must) the church be in expressing its own confessional stance? When Baptists emphasize believers' baptism, one could conclude that Baptists may have difficulties in echoing the intention of BEM to affirm two possible baptismal practices:

While the possibility that infant baptism was also practised in the apostolic age cannot be excluded, baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents.<sup>27</sup>

The Lima text in its commentary further explains:

The differences between infant and believers' baptism become less sharp when it is recognized that both forms

of baptism embody God's own initiative in Christ and express a response of faith made within the believing community.

Both forms of baptism require a similar and responsible attitude towards Christian nurture. A rediscovery of the continuing character of Christian nurture may facilitate the mutual acceptance of different initiation practices.<sup>28</sup>

Other issues, especially the relation of baptism to faith, have been much discussed in the dialogues.

### *Eucharist*

The role and theology of the eucharist have been on the agenda of the Faith and Order movement throughout its history, and likewise in most of the dialogues. Before the publication of BEM, the eucharist had been the most frequently treated of its three central themes. The chief questions related to the eucharist have been intercommunion and eucharistic hospitality, that is, between churches which do not have eucharistic fellowship.<sup>29</sup> The joint Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission which studied eucharist, ministry and authority from 1966 onwards, noted in their Report (ARCIC I) that intercommunion involves issues relating to authority and to the mutual recognition of ministry. The churches also mentioned the eschatological dimension of the eucharist, and its relation to contemporary questions of human liberation and social justice, as important related issues.<sup>30</sup> See also the "Five Affirmations on the Eucharist as Sacrifice" made by the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue in the USA, 1994.<sup>31</sup>

The Fourth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues, conducted by Faith and Order in 1985, expressed the view that the most wide-ranging and mature agreements between the churches had perhaps taken place precisely in eucharistic doctrine.<sup>32</sup>

It is also important that in the dialogues, areas of agreement are clearly stated and confirmed. Thus in the Anglican-Methodist

Covenant the churches reiterate their positive stance on what was agreed on the eucharist in the Lima text. The churches also welcome each other's communicants to the eucharist.<sup>33</sup> The churches state:

We commit ourselves to encourage forms of eucharistic sharing, including eucharistic hospitality, in accordance with the rules of our respective churches.

The convergence process is further elaborated in the Anglican-Methodist Joint Implementation Commission, with references to BEM:

5.1.4 The practical differences concerning the sacred elements are set out in the Common Statement (CS) within the context of broad agreement about the Eucharist. Drawing on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), Eucharist §§2-4, CS §132 gives a succinct but profound statement about the nature of the Eucharist. In this statement both our churches can recognise their own understanding of the Eucharist faithfully expressed. The following section of CS (§133) notes that the authorised liturgical forms in our churches are similar in structure: "Liturgical renewal has provided the most striking example of convergence between the churches, not least in the case of the Eucharist".<sup>34</sup>

5.5.3 There is a clear divergence of practice here although both traditions share a concern for reverent disposal. What is meant by "reverently" differs within the Methodist tradition and between the traditions. For Anglicans "reverently" means consuming the surplus during or immediately after the service, and, in the light of Methodist practice, they would ask in what ways, other than by consuming the consecrated elements, they might be reverently disposed of. HPME §46 shows that a small number in the Methodist Church desire change in the method of disposal on the grounds of greater reverence.

Interestingly, it is noted there that ecumenical sensibilities were not a motivating factor for change. Of all the divergences this is the one likely to be most sensitive. Although in official texts, neither the Methodist Church nor the Church of England connect the method of disposal of the surplus bread and wine with a particular understanding of their status, it is naive to suppose that church members, especially ministers, do not make such a connection. This is therefore a very sensitive ecumenical issue. As BEM, Eucharist §32 puts it:

Some churches stress that Christ's presence in the consecrated elements continues after the celebration. Others place the main emphasis on the act of celebration itself and on the consumption of the elements in the act of communion. The way in which the elements are treated requires special attention ... Given the diversity of practice among the churches ... it is worthwhile to suggest that ... it be recognised that the best way of showing respect for the elements served in the eucharistic celebration is by their consumption ...<sup>35</sup>

### *Ministry*

The question of ministry as treated in the dialogues has included several aspects including episcopal oversight, diaconate, and ordination of women and mutual recognition of ministries. ARCIC I stated that agreement on "the nature of ministry" is prior to the consideration of the mutual recognition of ministries. The partners also stated that mutual recognition presupposes acceptance of the apostolicity of each other's ministry.<sup>36</sup> For the Anglicans it has been necessary in their dialogues to take up the mutual recognition of ministries, and particularly the role of the episcopate as a sign of unity and continuity.<sup>37</sup>

At the Anglican-Orthodox international theological dialogue in

2005 the churches examined the doctrine of the ordained ministry of the Church. The Orthodox admitted that their emphasis on the local church is consistent with the Anglican Lambeth Quadrilateral's call for episcopacy to be locally adapted. The churches also agreed on sharing a eucharistic understanding of the local church. In this dialogue the term "eucharistic" was used in a broad sense: it includes the proclamation of the word and pastoral ministry, and presupposes the sacrament of baptism.<sup>38</sup>

Using again the Anglican-Methodist dialogue as an example, such a methodology proves to be useful. The churches repeat their positive stance on what is agreed on the Lima text on ministry. However, they emphasize that full visible unity requires a common ministry of word and sacrament; and all this should happen in the context of pastoral oversight. In the spirit of BEM, the churches are understood to exercise pastoral oversight in communal, collegial and personal ways – the pattern put forward by BEM, which has gained wide acceptance among the churches. The Anglicans and Methodists regard these three dimensions as expressions of the vital organic life of the Church, as a body infused by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> They state in their affirmations on the nature of the church, in line with several other dialogues:

We affirm one another's churches as true churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and as truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God.

We affirm that both our churches confess in word and life the apostolic faith revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the ecumenical Creeds.

On the question of ministry there is still much to be done. First, in the affirmations the churches in this dialogue recognize the existing situation:

We affirm that one another's ordained and lay ministries are given by God as instruments of God's grace, to build

up the people of God in faith, hope and love, for the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care and to share in God's mission in the world.

We affirm that one another's ordained ministries possess both the inward call of the Holy Spirit and Christ's commission given through the Church.

We affirm that both our churches embody the conciliar, connexional nature of the Church and that communal, collegial and personal oversight (*episkope*) is exercised within them in various forms.

We affirm that there already exists a basis for agreement on the principles of episcopal oversight as a visible sign and instrument of the communion of the Church in time and space.

Secondly, in the commitments it is clearly stated that a mutual recognition of ministries is not yet possible:

We commit ourselves, as a priority, to work to overcome the remaining obstacles to the organic unity of our two churches, on the way to the full visible unity of Christ's Church. In particular, we look forward to the time when the fuller visible unity of our churches makes possible a united, interchangeable ministry.

We commit ourselves to continue to develop structures of joint or shared communal, collegial and personal oversight, including shared consultation and decision-making, on the way to a fully united ministry of oversight.

#### 4. From BEM to koinonia

In the bilateral talks in the years immediately following the publication of BEM there was a clear convergence on the

understanding of the nature and purpose of the church. Encouraged by the whole BEM process, and especially by the official responses from the churches, the Faith and Order Commission prepared an extremely valuable document for the WCC Assembly in Canberra in 1991. It is obvious that the understanding of koinonia, as described in the text elaborated by the Faith and Order Commission "The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling", emerged at least partly from the bilateral dialogues. Summing up the healthy interaction experienced in the multilateral and bilateral conversations, this text states:

Churches have reached agreements in bilateral and multilateral dialogues which are already bearing fruit, renewing their liturgical and spiritual life and their theology.<sup>40</sup>

For the ongoing bilateral dialogues, this document gave a specific agenda to be followed in their efforts to express full visible unity. The WCC Assembly in Canberra called the churches:

- to recognize each other's baptism on the basis of the BEM document;
- to move towards the recognition of the apostolic faith as expressed through the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in the life and witness of one another;
- on the basis of convergence in faith in baptism, eucharist and ministry to consider, wherever appropriate, forms of Eucharistic hospitality; we gladly acknowledge that some who do not observe these rites share in the spiritual experience of life in Christ;
- to move towards a mutual recognition of ministries.<sup>41</sup>

Demonstrating the interaction between bilateral and multilateral dialogues, "Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness" became the theme of the Fifth World Conference on Faith



and Order held in Santiago de Compostela, Spain in 1993. The conference developed the notion of *koinonia* at length.

The Fifth Forum on Bilateral Conversations rightly pointed out in 1991 that the perspectives of the bilaterals match well the perspectives in many of the churches' responses to BEM.<sup>42</sup> This again is a clear sign of the impact which BEM has had through its own response process, and more broadly through its influence in the bilaterals.

What are the results of the bilaterals? Is it correct to talk about "results"? At the end of the Disciples of Christ-Reformed dialogue in 1987, the churches concluded:

One of the results of this dialogue has been the discovery that there is great diversity within each church family, so much so that serious questions must be raised about the validity of any purported church-dividing issues.<sup>43</sup>

This experience can be easily transferred, *mutatis mutandis*, to most of the bilateral conversations.

## 5. A spiritual process

In its interpretation of BEM the WCC Vancouver Assembly in 1983 underlined the fact that baptism, eucharist and ministry were healing and uniting signs of a Church living and working for a renewed and reconciled humankind. The Assembly emphasized the distinction between the process of reception and the official response of each particular church or denomination, with the latter regarded as an initial step taken by a church in a longer process of reception. Thus "reception" referred to the long-range process by which the churches "seek to recognize the one apostolic faith in and through the words of the text and freshly to lay hold of the new life which that faith promises". All this is deeply rooted in an essential *spiritual* process of reception in church encounters. The Vancouver

Assembly even spoke about a "spiritual pilgrimage" in the BEM process,<sup>44</sup> a view reinforced at the next WCC Assembly in the statement on unity as *koinonia*:

The unity of the church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one Eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation.<sup>45</sup>

## 6. The "Lima Liturgy"

The question of the role of the eucharistic liturgy used as the closing worship for the Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting in Lima in January 1982 – the "Lima liturgy" – has been widely discussed. In Max Thurian's words, in composing the liturgy the aim was to illustrate the solid theological achievements of the BEM document. He emphasizes that the eucharist is at the centre of the community and its mission.<sup>46</sup>

In my view the eucharist is not the "instrument" but rather the *goal* in the churches' efforts to express full visible unity. How much, and how, the Lima liturgy has led the discussions towards visible unity would be an interesting theme for study. It may suffice to say that it has acted as a positive stimulus at joint celebrations of the eucharist in many multilateral and bilateral gatherings.

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42. *International Bilateral Dialogues 1965-1991*, *op. cit.*, p.49.
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### III. BEM and beyond

# From “*anamnesis*” to “*metanoia*” – Beyond Convergence Texts, Towards Attitudinal Conversion

Rev. Dr Jacob Kurien

## I. Introduction

Almost half a century ago, Dr Lukas Vischer asked:

But can a church after being in fellowship with other Churches, still confess in exactly the same way the truth which has been entrusted to it? Is not its confession called in question by this fellowship? Does it not confess the truth in the awareness and hope that one day a common confession will be granted to a Christianity which is at present divided?”<sup>1</sup>

The history of the development and reception process of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) represents the ecumenical movement's chief effort up to now to move towards such a “common confession”. In the three important areas of baptism, eucharist and ministry of the church the document invited all churches to consider how far they had reached a consensus in their understanding and practice. BEM also gave points of division in these three areas, points where the churches did not agree. The lengthy response process confirmed or, in some cases, corrected the statements in BEM, thus offering a

clearer picture of where the churches actually "are" in their quest for unity.

This article first reviews the reception process of BEM in more detail, then returns to the four questions posed to the churches in BEM itself. Finally it offers six observations with special reference to the reception process, as a provocative basis for those who are engaged in ecumenical research looking to the future.

## II. The BEM reception process: a summary

The twenty-fifth year of a reception process is an auspicious occasion to evaluate the experience and its results. The process by which the churches responded to BEM deserves a closer look, since that process itself is an integral part of the "reception" of BEM.

The prestigious document of the Faith and Order Commission on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) was presented to the churches at the Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting held at the Oasis de Los Santos Apostoles, Lima, Peru in January 1982.<sup>2</sup> The document was, in general, the consummation of a study process going back all the way to the First World Conference on Faith and Order held in Lausanne in 1927. The process had been sharpened by the mandate given at the World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly held in Nairobi in 1975.<sup>3</sup> Draft texts of the different sections of the document were under review in the mid-1970s by the churches, who were asked for comments to be used in a further revision of the text. The final preparation of the text of BEM was in particular initiated at the Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting held in Bangalore in 1978.

The Bangalore Plenary Commission felt that in order to reach visible unity, three goals would have to be attained: (i) common understanding of the apostolic faith; (ii) mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist and ministry; (iii) agreement on common ways of teaching and decision making.<sup>4</sup> It was recognized that special study was needed in each of these areas, and consequently the mandate was

sustained to work out a convergence text on the churches' understanding of baptism, eucharist and ministry. (Work on the apostolic faith was carried out in a study process through the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> The questions of teaching and decision-making still await a full study process).

The modest hope on the part of the Faith and Order Commission was that once a convergence text was available, the mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist and ministry would be "easier" for the churches – easier because such a text could provide a basis for further work and discussion, making clear exactly where the churches agreed and disagreed in each area. In this hope the editorial working groups met at Geneva, Rome and Annecy in 1980 and 1981 and produced further draft texts. Their revision was presented to the Faith and Order Commission at Lima, 1982, where it was officially accepted with the following statement:

The commission considers the revised text on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" to have been brought to such a stage of maturity that it is now ready for transmission to the churches in accordance with the mandate given at the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi 1975 and re-affirmed by the Central Committee, Dresden, 1981.<sup>6</sup>

The reception process started in 1982 has witnessed to innumerable responses both official and non-official. As is well known, more than 180 member churches of the WCC responded along with numerous councils of churches, pastors and also lay study groups, and individuals. In the process, the major Christian traditions produced documents of considerable theological depth – and also practical wisdom – on BEM and its significance for the churches and the ecumenical movement today.



### III. BEM's questions to the churches: still relevant today

It is spiritually enlightening to note in these responses and documents the evolution of an ecumenical language from "inter-confessional" and "inter-denominational" apologetics to something approaching "inter-Church *'hospitality'*". But we must still ask: what is the total outcome of all these responses, and the process itself as a whole?

In the preface to the draft documents as they existed in 1975, then Faith and Order director Lukas Vischer had pointed out that "... Their purpose is to help bring the Churches closer together. Their overriding consideration is to make it possible for the Churches to achieve mutual recognition..."<sup>7</sup> Thus it is legitimate and even necessary, to ask whether and how far the reception process has actually shown signs of churches *coming closer to one another and achieving mutual recognition*.

As is well known, when BEM was sent to the churches for "official response ... at the highest appropriate level of authority",<sup>8</sup> four questions were posed to the churches. Focusing on these four questions, after 25 years of responses and reception of BEM by the churches it is legitimate to ask some corresponding *follow-up questions* for the churches' self-appraisal. These could help each church evaluate the actual significance of the whole BEM process for itself and for the other churches. These questions are as follows:

1. To what extent the churches in their responses to the BEM (as a convergence text) have actually mutually *recognized the Faith of the Church throughout the ages?*
2. Were the churches able to draw substantially from the text *for their relations and dialogues* with other churches – and did they actually do so?
3. Was there a serious effort on the part of the churches *to take guidance from the text for their worship, educational, ethical and spiritual life and witness?*
4. To what extent do the churches feel the need for a

*common expression of the apostolic faith, and what weight do they give to the BEM text as contributing to a common expression of the apostolic faith?*

### IV. A new approach is needed today: a provocative proposal

In the various testimonies of the churches' reception of BEM, including the no less than six volumes of *Churches respond to BEM*,<sup>9</sup> there certainly is an overall positive response to BEM. This has been widely documented and is acknowledged by all those working in the field of church dialogues and official inter-church relations.

However, the present writer would like to step back from the whole BEM process and the "system" of inter-church dialogues and, from this perspective, ask a challenging question: whether the real outcome of the responses is nothing but an indefinitely prolonged extension – or even stagnation – in unity discussions? As dramatic as this may seem, something like this is messaged symbolically in the statement by the Inter-Orthodox Symposium on BEM:

Reception of the BEM document as such does not necessarily imply an ecclesiological or practical recognition of the ministry and sacraments of non-Orthodox Churches. Such recognition would require a special action of the Orthodox Churches.<sup>10</sup>

In fact it is probably not only the Orthodox, but almost all other traditions as well, that wait for similar – and probably often undesired – "special action".

This suggests that the question of doctrinal convergence or agreement, and the continuing study of the churches' divergent theological, ecclesiological, liturgical and other positions, is not the only issue in the continuing search for unity. Even if agreement was achieved in all these areas of division, and perfect convergence texts were produced and adopted, it seems that "special action" would

still be necessary – that is, there would have to be a change in the “thinking” or, better, the “attitude” of the churches if they are really going to put the agreements into practice.

It is against this background and from this perspective that the present writer would present six observations which would highlight the need for an *attitudinal conversion*, more than bringing forth further *convergence texts*, in order to promote Christian unity in the future:

- First, even if the churches agree on the basic theological understandings concerning baptism, eucharist and ministry as presented by the BEM document, in order to accept and recognize each other's baptisms, eucharistic celebrations, and ministries, there are yet more things which have to take place. As important as BEM was and is, it by no means covers all the areas of division among the churches. In addition to this, it seems that new areas of possible division are developing since the response process for BEM.
- Second, it is one thing to evolve a common or agreeable liturgical order for eucharist, and still another thing to come together for such a liturgical celebration. The liturgical form and the wording may be acceptable to each church from an analysis of the text of the celebration. But it is a further step for the churches to join in the common *experience* of actually celebrating the eucharist together.
- Third, the experiences and lessons from church history teach us that church unity in full measure is not a necessary consequence of inter-communion. Churches in some traditions may have inter-communion according to their theological and ecclesiological understanding, yet they may remain divided or separate in other areas.

- Fourth, organic unity (as for example in the Indian church unions, the Church of South India and the Church of North India) is not yet proved, in itself, as a sufficient condition to bring about credible signs of Christian unity. As significant as these unions may be, it seems to me that they still show signs of internal division and diversity which raise questions.
- Fifth, certain credible signs of Christian unity are, on the other hand, visible even without – and sometimes outside – church situations of inter-communion or “organic unity”. Christian unity is not necessarily something which is achieved or demonstrated by having a certain common practice, or form of church organization.
- Sixth, unity in faith is experienced in certain traditions, but such experiences do not guarantee a *real* unity in spirit within such traditions. This point is particularly relevant to the Orthodox traditions. Theological unity is experienced among the Orthodox families; however the present writer believes that this does not necessarily strengthen the unity among them in other aspects. In fact in some ways the cultural and ethnic differences are more conspicuous within these families and between these churches. In this sense they are challenged to put their unity in the eucharist into practice in the life of the church as a whole.

## V. Conclusion

Speaking of “convergence texts” brings to mind the theological and historical factors that continue to divide the churches. Such texts, even if their aim is to move the churches forward towards unity, by definition focus on the language and legacy of the existing

divisions among the churches. In other words, such texts have the role of an "*anamnesis*" which, at least indirectly, perpetuates the culture of ecumenical stagnation. What we need for the future, however, is in fact an *attitudinal conversion*, a *metanoia* and this is what deserves to be the top priority in future deliberations by Faith and Order.

This article began with a quotation by Lukas Vischer reflecting the work of an earlier generation of Faith and Order. It showed how those who worked so hard to produce BEM as a convergence text were devoted to that noble task of arriving at a renewed common confession for the divided Christian traditions. The present writer takes the liberty to comment that, at the current stage of the ecumenical journey, Lukas Vischer for example would probably say that the agreement on common confession depends more on attitudinal conversion than on convergence texts. It would be interesting to know if this is indeed the case.

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7. *One Baptism, One Eucharist, and a Mutually recognised Ministry: Three Agreed Statements*, *op. cit.*, p.6.
8. BEM, "Preface", p.x.
9. *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vols. I-VI, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Papers No. 129, 132, 135, 137, 143, 144 respectively, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1986-1988.
10. *Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vol. I, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Paper No. 129, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1986, p.124-125.

*"Saltus liturgicus oecumenicus" –  
Two Perspectives on Ecumenical Dialogue  
"Beyond BEM"*

Rev. Dr Andreas H. Wöhle

I. Introduction

*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM)<sup>1</sup> has become an icon of the ecumenical movement. It is surrounded by a nimbus of memories and great and honourable names, visions of dramatic ecumenical advance, high expectations and dreams of a church less divided. Yet the gap is obviously wide between the perception of BEM among the ecumenically initiated specialists and the rest of humanity, the non-specialists both inside and outside the churches. An Internet search on "BEM" brings many and diverse results – from a method in physical science to the Board of Engineers of Malaysia, with much in between – before "our" BEM appears in the list.<sup>2</sup> To bridge the gap, to bring BEM and indeed the whole issue of the unity of the church to the awareness of everyday persons in the churches – not to mention the world – the ecumenical movement may be in need of different ways and perspectives to work on its path to (more) visible church unity.

The recent Faith and Order/World Council of Churches (WCC) document on ecclesiology, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (TNMC)<sup>3</sup> understands itself to be continuing the heritage of BEM.

Thus it is useful to ask: which perspectives present already in BEM, or in the process of its reception,<sup>4</sup> might open new possibilities for ecumenical advancement? My approach will be very limited since a general assessment of ecumenical developments, or an overall "harvest" of BEM-related changes in inter-church relationships, would exceed the scope of this article (and others have done this work on various occasions).<sup>5</sup> Rather I would like to dwell upon two selected perspectives which I find promising, and which might successfully be explored in more depth on the ecumenical journey ahead.<sup>6</sup>

As a Lutheran theologian I dare to take the ecclesiological freedom for this exploration from the *satis est* of the Augsburg Confession, Art. VII.<sup>7</sup> This indicates, as a matter of principle, the openness of the Lutheran tradition to dialogue with very different Christian traditions and ways of living out the Christian faith – ways which may be considered compatible with each other, neither church-dividing nor questioning the fundamental unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ.

## II. Two perspectives for future dialogue

### A. God's precurrent initiative of grace, transcending all defining discussions

The BEM text on Baptism begins with a characteristic definition of baptism as "a rite of commitment to the Lord who bestows his grace upon his people".<sup>8</sup> Even though the further description of the concept of baptism frequently engages the central imagery of the precurrent salvific initiative of the Lord in Jesus Christ,<sup>9</sup> the general description in BEM clings to a more human-centred and ritualistic line and the following chapters of BEM even argue for a certain balance of God's activity and human activity within baptism.<sup>10</sup>

Responding to this, the comments of many protestant churches

(and not only of Lutheran background), while generally agreeing with the importance of a human response to what is offered and promised in baptism, seek to keep "human activity" at a clear distance from the realm of the sacrament itself.<sup>11</sup> In fact this theme recurs in the remarks of many churches on the paragraphs in BEM dealing with the eucharist and Lord's supper.<sup>12</sup> In both cases the critical comments of the churches focus on the human role within the life of faith, in this case especially in relation to the church, its belief and its practices.

In relation to the mutual recognition of the sacraments in the different churches, it is the human dimension which is meant when the different "organizational forms", and hierarchical structures, of the churches (as well as their historic liturgical decisions) are considered only as a secondary and non-decisive element.<sup>13</sup> Here the Reformation concept which understands the Church to be the inclusive communion of those called to Faith by the Holy Spirit through the external Word of Grace – picturing church as process rather than as organizational structure – challenges the de-fining<sup>14</sup> (and thus potentially exclusive) features of a Church whose borders are derived from a *ius divinum*, without any human influence or input.

The BEM document seeks to recognize the *praxis pietatis* as an element of baptismal life. Many churches with a strong Reformation heritage challenge this as an effort to introduce humanly-determined ethics and morals into the very essence of the sacrament.<sup>15</sup> (This would obviously be, from a Lutheran perspective, very problematic in light of the doctrine of justification.)

The comments in BEM on the terminology of "Eucharist" as opposed to "Lord's Supper" are probably related to this difference in perspective (and thus theology).<sup>16</sup> Again the human role in relation to the essence of the sacrament – whether it is the person or the church which is "giving thanks" (*eucharistia*) – is debated (and implicitly questioned, even though the concept of a eucharistic response to God's precurring Grace is not strange to protestant theology). The comments of many protestant churches stress what is



evident, but not made explicit: that it is the Lord himself who invites to and acts at His table. That is, after all, why it is called the "Lord's Supper".

It seems that some features of the classical Law and Gospel debate<sup>17</sup> and the role of the human being (the famous question of "works") in the process of salvation, as well as conceptual differences about the origin and dignity of the *ordo* of the Church (is it *in divinum* or *in humanum*?), are hampering a common understanding among the churches. This impedes their practical, visible togetherness in the discussion of the BEM text as well.

#### *Possible perspectives for further ecumenical dialogue*

If this is correct, a possible way forward may be through a more theocentric, soteriological perspective on baptism (and on the eucharist). Since baptism is understood by all churches primarily as God's initiative, and since it is undisputedly the Lord himself who calls his people to communion at his table, who forms and rules his people—whether they be *inve divinum* or *inve humanum*—could (and would?) the churches be ready to "step back", and leave the initiative to the One who is acting (*efficitur*) and present in the sacraments? Unfolding this shared truth of faith would allow the formative elements of tradition, and the decisions of church bodies taken at particular times and contexts, to play a less decisive role. It would also remove from the sacramental realm any misleading suggestions of human activity. And this in turn would strengthen the undisputed consensus that our "common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is ... a basic bond of unity".<sup>18</sup>

What does this mean in practical terms? There is consensus among the churches that God's precurating graceful initiative in Christ is the decisive element in the salvific efficacy of baptism and the eucharist or Lord's supper. There is also consensus about the necessity of "personal commitment ... for responsible membership in the body of Christ".<sup>19</sup> Given this, it would be wise for future dialogue on both sacraments to discuss technically the elements of "initiative" and "response" quite separately. This opportunity was

missed in *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. The mutual recognition of each others' faith-imagery (and thus practices) might more easily be achieved, when differences among the churches are approached on the basis of the shared common experience of God's transforming presence in the sacraments.

#### *B. Gradual argumentative dialogue, or "leap of faith"? The "Leuenberg paradigm"*

*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, as most ecumenical texts, seems to be burdened with the rationalistic misconception that it is through discussion and argumentation on concepts of faith that one finds common understanding. This presupposes the possibility of a *gradual argumentative approach*, which advances until "enough" consent is piled up in order to be defined as a "common understanding". However the nature of the unity of the Church, and of the truths of faith contributing to and supporting this unity, is one which is not, in itself, compatible with the idea of "gradually building up", with the idea of "a little more" or "a little less" truth. Such an approach misses the point where truths of faith are concerned; these (despite the *finium capax infiniti*) are characterized fundamentally by a necessary exteriority and alteriority which keep them to some extent beyond the sphere of argumentative understanding.

This fundamental difference between what is approachable by argument, and what needs to be grasped in joined worship, has been partially acknowledged in the ecumenical method of the Leuenberg Concord and the process and communion which it initiated.<sup>20</sup>

Many who have accompanied the Leuenberg process for some time, as Lukas Vischer has done,<sup>21</sup> may argue that it was precisely the doctrinal study processes which solved the crucial theological disputes, corrected misconceptions, and thus led to the acknowledgement that many doctrinal differences need no longer be considered church-dividing.<sup>22</sup> However it is clear that there were, and (even after many years of further doctrinal study) still are, many

difficult questions of language and theology confronting the Leuenberg Community (or, as it is now known, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe or CPCE).

One could even conclude, from the repetitive pattern of arguments in different Leuenberg study documents, that some theological positions might never be "consolidated". Thus the 1973 declaration, stated that the signing partners

... affirm together the common understanding of the gospel elaborated (...). This common understanding of the gospel enables them to declare and to realize church fellowship ... (and that) condemnations expressed in the confessional documents no longer apply to the contemporary doctrinal position of the assenting churches.<sup>23</sup>

But this cannot claim to rest solidly upon rational theological arguments developed in the studies preceding the Concord, or in the text of the Concord itself. One needs to recognize – and positively – that the "method" of Leuenberg is more than a technical model of finding or formulating ecumenical consensus. It is, rather, one of a thoroughly prepared and celebrated "Leap of Faith"!

On the level of argumentation one may define this as a method of "proleptic consensus",<sup>24</sup> reached *through* but not *in* doctrinal discussions. In the Leuenberg paradigm, however, it is more than just a jump ahead to a point which would have been by argumentation reached later on, when all remaining questions of doctrine had been dealt with. The churches united in the CPCE have in fact formulated a concept of "transcending consensus", in order to live as one communion despite the differences in their ways of being church. This consensus exceeds the realm of theological discussion, and creates a space and an opportunity for the actual *experience* of church communion. As an ecumenical model of being church together, "Leuenberg" is a genuine European contribution, one rooted in the Holy Spirit who encouraged, and encourages, the

churches to take a "Leap of Faith" where rational theological discussion would probably not be able to carry them.

It is the Lord himself, celebrated and present in common worship within the CPCE, who bridges all remaining gaps and calls the people to be his "*ecclesia*", his church.

Even as the "Leap of Faith" is celebrated in the communion of the CPCE, the ongoing dialogues on theological subjects on which the churches differ are, in a way, the "liturgy" that necessarily accompanies this leap. They are necessary because words, music and reflection, as well as silence and prayer, are necessary forms of all liturgical celebration. And they are "representative", as liturgy re-presents" the gospel of the Lord in experiential categories and imagery.

As *signum et exemplum*<sup>25</sup> the ongoing dialogues on doctrinal differentiation within the CPCE point beyond themselves, transcending their own subjects. It must be admitted, however, that it took a long time in the Leuenberg process before the celebrative and trans-argumentative aspects of the communion declared among the churches were put effectively to work.

#### *Possible perspectives for further ecumenical dialogue*

Based on what is described above, I would like to plead for the necessity of a "Leap of Faith", as dared in the Leuenberg Communion, in order that we may move forward on the ecumenical path towards more visible and practical church unity. In this perspective the task of the ecumenical movement is a strongly spiritual one.<sup>26</sup> It will need increasingly to draw on the experience of joint worship in order to approach the Lord's gift of the one Church, called to be Church in Jesus Christ, a gift that needs to be understood and accepted gracefully on a level transcending the argumentative.

The *celebrative* element of the ecumenical movement, therefore, needs to be strengthened more than has been intentionally done so far. Joint worship needs to be the starting point and wellspring of inspiration for the ecumenical endeavour, not its "end".

More existentially, it may be put in the image of a relationship: "Unity" can only be celebrated, it is never "constructible" or discussible, and is only accessible to eucharistic approaches. This is true for the relationship with God (his people, the "Church", seeking God's presence), as for human relationships. Unity is never a static situation nor a state of being, but a declared and celebrated, liturgically presented "place"<sup>7</sup>, a place which must be realized and put into practice over and over again.

Ritual and liturgy, discussion and dialogue help to do this. They can accompany and strengthen the struggle for this "space". But the decision to be gracefully what we are called to be as churches, to be One in Jesus Christ, must come first.

If the ecumenical movement dares to push itself to such a decisive "Leap of Faith", it will "fall on its feet" but then move ahead, probably stumbling, perhaps initially looking a little clumsy on the ecumenical dance-floor which has so far been dominated by doctrinal elegance and argumentation.

But it may, thus, find strength for new approaches, it may understand more clearly the melody and "rhythm" of God's programme for the one Church, and may in the long run please the Lord – and itself as well.

## NOTES

1. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982.
2. Admittedly the full name of the document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, produces much better results.
3. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2005.
4. Comments of churches quoted in this article are from the series *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, vol. I-VI, ed. by Max Thurian, Faith and Order Papers No. 129, 132, 135, 137, 143, 144 respectively, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1986-88, and are quoted with reference to the corresponding vol. number.

5. See for an overall view: *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963-1993*, ed. by G. Gassmann, Faith and Order Paper No. 159, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1993. Concentrating on results of the reception, see P. Neuner, "Impulse und Ihre Folgen: Eine systematisch-theologische Bilanz zur Wirkungs-geschichte der Lima-Dokumente", in *Ökumenische Rundschau*, 51. Jg, Oct. 2002, H. 4, pp.403-423.

6. This article draws upon BEM and the Leuenberg Agreement. Lukas Vischer has been a principal motor and chronicler of the ecumenical story of both BEM and the Leuenberg story, and thus it seems fit to draw upon both in an article dedicated to him. See Lukas Vischer, "A History of the Leuenberg Agreement", in *Rowing in One Boat: A Common Reflection on Lutheran-Reformed Relations Worldwide*, ed. by Lukas Vischer, John Knox Series No. 11, Geneva, International Reformed Centre John Knox, 1999, pp.9-23.

7. "... And to the true unity of the Church it is enough ( *satis est*) to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: "[... one Lord], one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, ..." (Eph. 4:5, 6).

8. BEM, "Baptism", §1.

9. BEM, "Baptism", §§2-7.

10. "Baptism is both God's activity and our human response to that gift." BEM, "Baptism", §8.

11. See for example the comment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria in *Churches Respond to BEM*, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, pp.28, 29; "Reservations and suggestions"; Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, in *op. cit.*, vol. V, p.71, point c; North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, in *op. cit.*, vol. I, p.41; Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic, in *op. cit.*, vol. V, p.125.

12. See Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, in *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p.31; Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, vol. V, p.20, point 4; Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, in *op. cit.*, vol. V, p.76, point c and p.78, point c.

13. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, in *op. cit.*, vol. IV, p.34, where elements belonging to the order and structure of the church are considered of "secondary theological importance"; see also: Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic, in *op. cit.*, vol. V, pp.137, 141. The terminology of *adiaphora* is not explicitly used in this context, but the concept seems to be intended. See Formula of Concord 10 with regard to the *Confessio Augustana* (Augsburg Confession), Art. 7.

14. From "*finis*", Latin for "borderline".

15. Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic, in *op. cit.*, vol. V, pp. 124-125.
16. North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, in *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 43, note 1.
17. See for a general overview the still-useful book *Geetz und Evangelium – Beiträge zur gegenwärtigen theologischen Diskussion*, ed. by E. Kinder and K. Haentel, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968. Or for an English publication: Gerhard O. Forde, *The Law-Gospel debate – An interpretation of its historical development*, Minneapolis, MN, 1969. More recently: A. Wöhle, *Luthers Freude an Gottes Geetz: Eine historische Quellensstudie zur Oszillation des Geetzesbegriffes Martin Luthers im Licht seiner alttestamentlichen Predigten*, Frankfurt, Haag & Herchen, 1998, and *idem*, "Luther and the Law – The Concept of the Law in the Light of Luther's Sermons on Old Testament Texts", in *Luther Digest*, vol. 6, Luther Academy Crestwood, Missouri, 1998, S. 19-25.
18. BEM, "Baptism," §6.
19. BEM, "Baptism," §8.
20. It is for good reason that many churches, in their comments to BEM, refer to Leuenberg as well.
21. L. Vischer, "A history of the Leuenberg Agreement", in *Rowing in One Boat: A Common Reflection on Lutheran-Reformed Relations Worldwide*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-23.
22. A general remark here: as much as the arguments in the Leuenberg process (and in most other ecumenical dialogues) are presented in the publications as essentially doctrinal and theological, it would help all ecumenical discussions if non-theological factors and motives (of power and politics) behind the theological terminologies were more courageously mentioned as well.
23. The Leuenberg Agreement, art. 1 and 32b.
24. For the concept of the Leuenberg Agreement as a "proleptic consensus" (in the practical situation of the process of unification of the Dutch Protestant churches) see: A. Wöhle, "Leuenberger Konkordie startpunt voor gemeenschappelijk kerk-zijn", in *ELK* 30/1, Woerden (NL), 1998, p. 4 (inspired by earlier conversation with K. Zwanepol on the topic): "By stating that we agree with each other in the core-understanding of the Gospel ... we dare to jump over the divide of the manifest and obvious differences in the teaching and the life of our churches..." (translation mine). The terminology of "proleptic consensus" was introduced later to the English linguistic community. See: R. Saarinen, "Porvoo and the Leuenberg Concord – Are they comparable?", in *Apostolicity and Unity, Essays on the Porvoo Common Statement*, ed. by O. Tjorthom, Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans, 2002, pp. 258-269. And: "proleptic doctrinal consensus", K. Zwanepol, "Dutch Lutheranism keeps its identity as it becomes part of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands", in *Currents in Theology and Mission*, June 2005.
25. For the development in the understanding of the concept of *signum/sign*

- within sacramental theology, where for example Luther's perspective of the *signum* starts to carry "effective" weight with regard to "directing" the faithful towards Christ, see: E. Bizer, *Fides ex auditu: Eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gewichtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther*, Neukirchen Kreis Moers, Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1958, p. 160, or A. Wöhle, *Luthers Freude an Gottes Geetz: Eine historische Quellensstudie zur Oszillation des Geetzesbegriffes Martin Luthers im Licht seiner alttestamentlichen Predigten*, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
26. To be differentiated from the terminology of spiritual ecumenism as presented by Cardinal Kasper in his "Handbook for Spiritual Ecumenism", which still finds its exclusive restrictions within the defined Roman Catholic categories of a communion *in sacris* and *in spiritualibus*!
  27. To be understood in the meaning of the German word *Ort* as a "place" in a more than physical sense.

## Ecclesiology and Shared Identity

Twenty-five years after its publication *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* requires a fresh reflection in the context of ecclesiology and the unity of the church

Dr Tamara Grdzelidze

This essay sets out to trace something of the development of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), and the process of response and reception, and to set this in the context of the broader, more recent work on ecclesiology summed up in *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (TNMC).<sup>1</sup> The following essay points to outstanding issues and tries to discern from previous experience how to take forward constructively the current process on *The Nature and Mission of the Church*.

The ecclesiological issues of baptism, eucharist and ministry were reflected on ecumenically and many aspects of these reflections were agreed on through the Lima text. The quest for further deliberation on ecclesiological issues following the publication of BEM in 1982, and the six volumes of the churches' responses (1986-1988), demonstrated that the ecumenical movement recognized how timely such an effort was.

Twenty-five years after the publication of BEM, Faith and Order has been following up its heritage in a larger ecclesiological



framework, asking churches to engage themselves in a serious reflection on the nature and mission of the church today. Certainly, without the previous efforts which resulted so successfully in BEM, churches could not have addressed ecclesiological questions which at present have vital importance for their future relationships.<sup>2</sup> The interaction between multilateral and bilateral discussion is decisive for this endeavour, although both texts, BEM and the recent TNMC, are the results of multilateral encounters. BEM raised the expectation that a certain convergence on themes related to the experience of every Christian would feed the development of a new perspective on ecclesiology. *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, while reflecting the ecclesiological convergence, has a potential to fill some remaining gaps in the convergence on baptism, eucharist and ministry. Therefore the ecclesiological issues in discussion today are substantial, as well as delicate.

BEM raised the expectation among some that it could serve as the sufficient theological consensus for the divided churches, in order to make mutual recognition possible. Certainly this is true of BEM in many respects. It became extremely helpful for churches in local contexts, and broadened the ecumenical horizon so that from the convergence reached on baptism, eucharist and ministry the focus shifted to the question of the *church* itself – a much larger and multi-level framework for the discussions.

BEM, in general, did not cover in a satisfactory way the dogmatic positions of particular confessions; rather it provided a great opportunity for the churches to converge on their shared faith, in spite of the confessional differences. Thus BEM expresses the truths that the faith and apostolic tradition are one, and that the churches maintain the same baptism, eucharist and ministry profoundly rooted in the faith and apostolic tradition; and that the churches can think together anew how to put this unity into practice in the service of the renewal of the world, and of their dynamic presence in the world.

### BEM in the light of world Christian gatherings

The common understanding of unity is a precursor to a convergence text. Discussions on unity at World Council of Churches assemblies and Faith and Order world conferences have contributed to a methodology which was deemed worthy of ecclesiological consideration, namely that of *convergence*. Achieving a common mind on unity is not an easy task because each church has its own understanding of unity depending, in turn, on its own ecclesiological understanding.

The genesis of BEM, according to Lukas Vischer, goes back to the Fourth Faith and Order World Conference in Montreal (1963) and, even more decisively, to the Faith and Order Commission meeting in Aarhus (1964). The clash of opinions over the nature and mission of the church in Montreal was long remembered: some insisted on constructing bridges between different confessions, while others considered that a common understanding of the church had to emerge in the context of the challenges of the contemporary world. It was in Montreal that Oliver Tomkins, then moderator of the Faith and Order Commission, called the difficult debates, especially on the nature of the church – “a most promising chaos”.<sup>3</sup>

Work towards BEM was decided in the context of the commonly shared assumption that “the actual experience of the churches might open up new, common perspectives. ... The churches’ practice was to be the focus of joint theological reflection.”<sup>4</sup> The churches were to reflect on how they might come closer to one another in their worship life in spite of their differences. In the process of reflecting on the eucharist, it became clear that issues of baptism and ministry had also to become a part of the study process, by involving a broad range of persons.<sup>5</sup>

The New Delhi (1961) and Nairobi Assemblies (1975) treated the issue of “unity in diversity” in different ways, but were together in avoiding suppressing the issue. The Canberra Assembly (1991), with its statement on unity as *koinonia*, did not seem to fall in the

same line as statements from these earlier assemblies. If the New Delhi conception of unity focuses on "unity in each place", the Nairobi statement suggests "a universal conciliar fellowship". A major criticism with regard to the Canberra Statement on unity fell on the treatment of the theme of "unity in diversity" as being suppressed. The theme itself was familiar to both New Delhi and Nairobi, but did not give an impression that diversity was being suppressed, as in Canberra:

Diversity is illegitimate when, for instance, it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and the Saviour the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8); and salvation and the final destiny of humanity as proclaimed in holy scripture and preached by the apostolic community.<sup>6</sup>

The other criticism was close to this, namely, that of the proposal to consider intermediate stages as the "means" of reaching the goal of unity. The text shows no trace of alarm at the fact that despite "a certain degree of communion already existing among them", the fellowship among the churches is being threatened from within.<sup>7</sup> Lukas Vischer argues against a gradual process of growth from division into unity; rather he suggests that it is only if "all the churches undergo a process of renewal" that unity will likely be achieved.<sup>8</sup> The reality of this conviction has become clear as a result of the conciliar process.

The Bangalore vision from the Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting in summer 1978 was of agreement in one faith, mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist and ministry, and agreement on common ways of teaching and decision making. This vision was lost in Canberra.<sup>9</sup> The problem in seeking agreement on common ways of teaching and decision making reflects differences among churches of a very complex nature: if the Orthodox find the weight (*gravitas*) of authority in the Tradition, the Roman Catholic Church in the magisterium, the Free Churches in all believers, then can there really be a methodology which will make these different

authoritative modes compatible? The theme of *binding decisions* is decisive for issues of unity. In the World Communion context Lukas Vischer argues that the question which should be raised is how, "despite all divergences, common decisions can be taken by all world communions."<sup>10</sup>

### Potential of ecumenical convergence texts

How could BEM achieve a peaceful resolution of the controversy between the Christian Tradition as a whole, and the specific ecclesial contexts? Did it take for granted the Montreal understanding of the universal Tradition and the specific traditions? BEM maintained its theological convergence by taking into consideration contextual sensitivities and concentrating on the living tradition of the churches. BEM "has proved to be a convergence instrument,"<sup>11</sup> writes Mary Tanner, because it affected the life of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion and relationships with other churches. By referring to the Lima text (BEM) in various contexts as a shared "instrument" – whether in matters of spiritual life or in inter-church relations – and by offering these promising results to the synod of the Church, as well as to the whole people of God, the reception of BEM as a convergence statement has been enabled.

Some of the essays in the present collection illustrate the fact that such a reception is possible through preparatory work, and through discussions and studies on issues of Faith and Order and their effect on ongoing discussion processes such as bilateral (or trilateral) conversations. What we learn from Mary Tanner reinforces the motivation for an honest discussion in the churches at various levels. The task of theologians in this context is immense. It involves helping those who are directly involved in church structures – who are, for their part, also theologians – to think critically about the relevance of inter-church agreements to local church situations and to the governance of the Church.

**Following the responses to BEM**

The analysis of the responses to BEM revealed an appreciation for bridging the divided churches. The BEM process, it was noted, "makes sense only when considered in the framework of broader processes."<sup>12</sup> That is, the ongoing relationships between the churches gave a solid foundation for the convergence in BEM. Relationships beget convergence, and convergence feeds relationships. On the other hand, the analysis of the responses showed that most churches considered BEM as "an instrument of a broader and ongoing historical process in twentieth century church history."<sup>13</sup>

The responses were encouraging to the extent that, shortly following their publication, the Faith and Order Commission proposed ambitious tasks and opted to work towards a visible ecclesiological *rapprochement* between the churches.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the transformation of the agreement on three aspects of church life (baptism, eucharist and ministry) into the issue of ecclesiology was to emerge. This hasty transformation deserves, I believe, some criticism for tackling the question of the church in its entirety and seeking an agreement at that level, which is very different from seeking a convergence on the three most important aspects of the church. The issues of baptism, eucharist and ministry are still non-exhaustive, and the dynamics of authority which unite them into the framework of the *church* are very complex.

**Reception of BEM**

The reception of ecumenical texts is a selective process in which each church chooses how to participate, with respect to its capacity and given its confessional and contextual reality. The reception of ecumenical documents includes various aspects, from the official endorsement of a document which has an immediate effect on a

church structure, to the indirect reflection of its positions through those who participated directly in it. The reception of ecumenical texts takes place not only through the written documents but also, and perhaps even mostly, through the persons who have participated in the process. Therefore the reception of ecumenical texts occurs, mainly through the people of God who, in their various capacities, demonstrate their witness to the processes which have resulted in a particular convergence text.

Where does the reception of a document begin? Reception begins at various levels as soon as the document goes out to the churches, and beyond. For example, the reception of the ecclesiological questions, as stated in *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*,<sup>15</sup> which was the first draft of TNMC, generated discussions at the level of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches. Since the ecclesiological issues have been addressed and reflected upon by such a high-profile ecumenical body, this process became a means of a kind of "reception" in churches of the ecclesiological issues raised and discussed.<sup>16</sup>

The problem in addressing the question of church unity remains, to a great extent, with the churches' degree of commitment to unity. Some of the questions related to this were taken up by the Faith and Order study on "Ecclesiology". Whether the present study document, TNMC, manages to address these issues adequately is another matter, which will become clear only through the churches' responses to the text. For their part, the churches will have to reconsider the significance of the search for unity in the light of the potential renewal which could follow the gradual reception of their ecclesiological convergence. The question remains open, whether the churches will allow "equal space" for ecumenical debates on the Apostolic Faith<sup>17</sup> and on Ecclesiology – since the former has been published for some time.

One thinks immediately of the enormous difference between the churches in their understanding of the question of "renewal" or "development" in the church. For the Church of England, it is

existential to maintain the commitment to renewal together with a strong commitment to the Tradition of the Church. For the Orthodox Church, a commitment to renewal is much more complex: it does take place, inevitably, but not always under the heading of "renewal" – rather in a delicate and unemphasized way. Clearly, therefore, churches cannot commit themselves to relate the convergence agreements to their life in the same measure and degree. Each church commits itself in its own way, certainly, and in a measure which is manageable to each one. The great input which BEM provided for church agreements such as Meissen, Porvoo or Reuilly has been widely acknowledged by English, French, German and Scandinavian theologians.<sup>18</sup> The question which matters is: did these agreements become possible only through the common faith of the churches involved, or were there additional factors which guaranteed their reception?

The reception of BEM in the churches is an ongoing process, as proved by the papers presented in this volume. In fact, Faith and Order work so far has been maintained in the framework of a church-centred ecumenism which leaves little space to move along non-confessional lines. However, "formal ecumenical endeavours" have also become an undeniable factor of influence on the wider ecumenism: the agreed parts of ecumenical texts – and even more so, the common experience in worship and witness which lie behind them – bring together the various confessional and non-confessional strands, and acknowledge their capacity to go beyond their own structures without denying or destroying themselves.<sup>19</sup> At a particular historical moment, churches agreed that BEM embraced the confessional differences, and overcame them without discarding them. But clearly the excitement of this agreement was overshadowed by manifold *dis*agreements, which emerged in various configurations.

### BEM and ecclesial identity

What brings people to the same church? Why do the faithful go to a particular church, or what establishes a relationship between the members of a congregation?

These questions have been important for the last decades; they address issues which lie at the heart of the ecumenical movement: staying and praying together as Christians. Coming together for prayer can be a matter of one's choice or, as is true in most cases, an expression of one's identity. The standard pattern for attending church services has been that faithful go to the closest church; but in urban areas, especially in big cities, joining a church becomes more and more a matter of individual choice. It becomes increasingly common also to attend – regularly or occasionally – a church which is not of one's own confession.

It is also true that when the faithful find themselves "uncomfortable" in one place, they feel free to go to a new place for prayer. Under the present circumstances of extensive migration globally, regularity in attending a particular church is connected with the sense of one's affinity with a place of worship, with the ministry as it is "performed" there, and with the particular congregation. Another fact easily observed today is the great number of tourists and travellers going around churches, entering them and sitting in silence and discernment. One may suppose that not all of them have been baptized in these churches.

In this context a discrepancy might occur between what believers may seek in the church, and what the churches offer. The particular confessional identities often have to face a loose, general quest for spirituality on the part of the members of a congregation. Would people in a quest for spirituality, even Christian spirituality, find it easy – or even important – to converge on ecclesiological issues?

In light of the recent Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in February 2006 in Porto Alegre, it would be

reasonable to ask whether the spiritual life in Porto Alegre proved that people are eager to pray together and to share each other's gifts. In general the spiritual life at the assembly felt "all right": it was well prepared, well led, well sung. Certainly there were moments that not everyone could tolerate but even so, the morning and evening prayers, opening and closing services, went smoothly and were very well attended. When hundreds (or even thousands) of people come under one tent to worship; when they follow a service outline which has an unfamiliar shape and contains some unfamiliar material; when music can be so beautiful but so strange; it is utopian to expect unanimity. The criterion for measuring whether it "went well" or not is attendance, and it was generally well attended. Therefore it is fair to say that people were not disappointed in their praying together. How different would it have been for those at the Assembly if the eucharistic meal had been shared? And was it painful that sharing of the eucharistic meal was not possible? Well-attended prayers were still a poor indicator for measuring how much affinity these prayers inaugurated among the participants and whether all those gathered felt sharing the same identity in this way or the other and belonging without hindrance to the same Lord Jesus Christ.

A snapshot from my personal experience in the recent past: a beautiful Lutheran liturgy in a remote Scandinavian town lasts a long time. The church is packed – but all together there are not more than 100 persons. At the time of the eucharist, all but the Orthodox and Catholics step out to receive communion. It feels strange, it hurts, it makes no sense – this was how the "people in the pews" felt when I sat there as a guest of the congregation. At the WCC Assembly, non-sharing of the eucharistic meal did not feel as painful as in a parish with a handful of people: here the brokenness was felt more strongly.

Does BEM relate to the issue of belonging to the church? Can any convergence text claim a link to matters of identity? This is important because BEM has been widely used to increase the sense of common belonging, and this raises the question: how can people

in various contexts "function" as Christians? We shall come back to this issue in a few moments.

### *The Nature and Mission of the Church (TNMC)*

The reception of ecumenical theology is at the centre of this essay because this is an ongoing process for the churches involved in the ecumenical movement and a battlefield for ecumenical theologians: the actual experience of reception will prove or disprove the ideas offered, the challenges raised and the expectations nurtured by drafters and inspirers of these texts. As soon as TNMC went to the churches and to a wider public, to the *oikoumene*, a process started which eventually will be identified as a "reception". The aim is to show that the future reception – if it happens! – has been rooted in the process which BEM bestowed unto the churches. Even if the present ecclesiology text has a different status from BEM, once TNMC has been sent to the churches for response<sup>20</sup> the two texts or, even more so, the two processes will be connected in the minds of those who have to examine and evaluate the present ecclesiology text. TNMC, after all, claims to be "a stage towards convergence". There will be an unavoidable link, in spite of the different status of the two texts.

One question will be how to maintain the centrality of *sacramental theology* in the multilateral discussions. This is due to the new constellation of groups within the ecumenical movement, as compared to the time of BEM. The present lively debate is undertaken by a grouping which is more inclusive, and which finds it more difficult to make confessional differences its major point of reference. If in the times of BEM the vital participation of the Roman Catholic Church was a big achievement, in the reflection on and drafting of TNMC, Free Churches also took part.<sup>21</sup>

What happened in the last period of the preparation of TNMC which meant to provide basic ecumenical perspectives on ecclesiology and become a source of renewal? With the approval of



the Faith and Order Commission, the Faith and Order Secretariat carried out four consultations hoping that such a project on ecclesiology would "respond to some critical comments to BEM and draw on the increasing ecumenical discussions on the understanding of the church evident in a number of international bilateral dialogues."<sup>22</sup>

### From TNPC to TNMC

The period between *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* and *The Nature and Mission of the Church* was marked by a series of consultations held under the auspices of the Faith and Order Commission in order to help the drafting process. The report from the consultation on "The Sacramental Nature of the Church" ends with a statement which is unusual for a multilateral text: "As both Church and Eucharist reveal the mystery of salvation through the Cross and point to its eschatological fulfillment, it is appropriate to recognize that the Church has a sacramental nature."<sup>23</sup>

This statement is all the more striking because it did not issue from easy and homogenous discussions, as the report itself testifies. On the contrary, it says that there are major differences among the churches about using, or not using, sacramental language in reference to the Church. This use, or non-use, of such language itself embraces considerable variations; the question of whether to apply – and how to apply – a sacramental language is itself a church divisive issue, which has to deal with where the churches stand historically or theologically in relation to the sacraments of the church. These understandings range from recognizing a participation in the Trinitarian *koinonia*, to questioning whether God binds Godself to particular presences and activities, and to the rejection of sacraments as such.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of such a diverse treatment of the issue, the TNMC drafting group, after listening carefully to one another and after discussing the theological insights of the diverse positions noted

above, could go as far as stating the theological convergence mentioned above. From the perspective of the reception of BEM, to converge on the line of *sacramental language concerning the church* is a remarkable achievement. BEM, after all, did not intend to raise the issue of sacramentality regarding baptism, eucharist and ministry. For the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions this was a significant deficiency; for these churches it would be inappropriate to omit this topic from a discussion on the Church.

Although the understanding of sacraments remains a divisive issue in the church, through theological reflection the drafting group could converge along the following lines: (1) the presence of Christ in the sacraments ("I am the Way, the Truth and the Life", John 14:6); (2) a corporate vs. individual sense of salvation as the mystery of God's plan of salvation ("He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time to gather all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth," Eph. 1:9-10); (3) continual repentance and spiritual renewal ("Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit", Acts 2:38); and (4) the epicletic nature of Christian worship and life, which makes explicit their eschatological dimension ("But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you", Acts 1:8, and "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you", John 14:26).

In the realm of ecclesiology, the issues of authority and ministry are very closely related. The consultation on "Authority and Authoritative Teaching" sought to improve the treatment of the issue of authority in the ecclesiology text. It tried to develop an understanding of authority based on the biblical witness to authority as "teaching and healing with power". The consultation addressed the question: "How far is such teaching and healing with power still within the mission of the Church in today's world?"<sup>25</sup>

Authority in the Church derives from the ultimate authority of

the Triune God and God's manifestations, the Scriptures and the Tradition, which play a normative role in discernment. The mode of relation between the authority and authoritative teaching of the Church and the world is a point of conflict for the churches. This is because for some theological traditions the Church is a part of the world, and for other traditions the Church *is* the whole world. Significantly, both views conflict with the secularization which characterizes our times.

Among the other important convergent points was the relational and interdependent nature of authority in the Church, which merges into the notion of reception from the ecclesiological perspective: "The reception of the Word in the power of the Spirit is the human response to the initiative of God in this divine-human dialogue which constitutes the mystery of salvation."<sup>26</sup> The authority issuing from the church, ecclesial authority, is led by the Holy Spirit and supported by the grace of God; therefore it is credible and works for salvation. Human free will, or freedom of choice (interpreted along the lines of John 8:32, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free", or Galatians 5:1, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery"), is a test for the credibility of authority within the Church. Through this understanding, human self-sufficiency and isolation give way to mutual accountability and obedience to the gospel of Christ, so that distorted or abused forms of authority in the Church are revealed.

The consultation unanimously welcomed the definition of authority in the Church, proposed as holiness:<sup>27</sup> "When the search for holiness diminishes in the life of the Church, the intensity of authentic ecclesial authority also diminishes, precisely because the holiness of life is simply the main purpose of exercising ecclesial authority."<sup>28</sup>

Did the consultation answer the initial question about "How far ... such teaching and healing with power is still within the mission of the Church in today's world"? In spite of the fact that the input on authority and authoritative teaching was immense and varied, it

is not difficult to see its impact on TNMC. Although the paragraph on authority itself is very short, it brought into discussion some very important aspects of ecclesiology which had not been highlighted before – and this to the extent that the Faith and Order Standing Commission decided, in June 2006, to take up further study on the sources of authority and on decision-making in the Church.

The other consultation in this series was on "Ministry and Ordination in the Community of Women and Men in the Church". The title itself shows the complexity of the matter: are ministry and ordination the same, or different? There is no single answer to this question. The report from the consultation highlighted this complexity, bringing together so many difficult and important questions related to the ministry in the church in order to "identify issues which might helpfully be explored in the development of an ecumenical convergence on ministry in the future".<sup>29</sup> It is a well known fact that the "Ministry" section in BEM omitted some outstanding areas of disagreement; but some of these areas have found their way into TNMC. The ministry section of BEM presented an important – but minimalistic – convergence and essentially left out the aspect of ministry related to church structures and authority. BEM claimed convergence on apostolic continuity, but did not tackle the issue of the divergent interpretation of this matter by different traditions.

The report from the consultation on "Ministry and Ordination" refers to the "Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches". It notes how the discrepancy is described between the two major Christian theological streams, and highlights this ecclesiological dilemma within the framework of ministry: "The ecumenical conversation might be furthered by exploring together the criteria recognizing apostolicity in another ecclesial body and its ministry."<sup>30</sup>

Ministry and ordination, and ordination and priesthood, are topics for further examination. They seem to be issues related to church structures but, in fact, they are matters as much personal and communal as structural. The report also pointed out the necessity of

placing the responsibility for vocation to ministry in the context of the authority of oversight in the Church.

The window on future fruitful ecumenical discussions and convergence in the area of ministry was identified as the topic of ordination rites. Further study was suggested of the ordination rites of the churches, including Pentecostal and Evangelical churches, as follows:

- the way ordination rites indicate the relation between the ordained ministry and the people of God, both the local Church and the wider Church. Members of the congregation are not there as passive observers, but take an active role in affirming the worthiness of the candidate and promising support for his/her future ministry. This raises the question of whether ordination can be said to be related to the ministry of the “whole Church” when the churches are still divided;
- in relation to what is signified in the laying-on of hands. In all traditions the laying-on of hands by those who have had hands laid on them is a part of the rite. What does this suggest about the way apostolicity and succession is understood and what is signified about the apostolicity of the whole Church when laity take part in the laying-on of hands?
- sacrament and sacramentality. All recognize the grace of God at work in ordination. Ordination is a gift of God. What does this imply about the notion of sacramentality/sacrament even when the words are not used in a particular tradition?
- the local and universal Church. How far is the participation of other presbyter/bishops in ordinations understood as a link between the local church and other local churches in the wider communion of the Church?<sup>31</sup>

This consultation should be noted for its remarkable freshness on difficult ecumenical topics – not least its peaceful and constructive discussions on the ordination of women, with a very serious input from the Orthodox theologians present. The emphasis on the need to examine much more deeply the links between ordination rites, and various aspects of church life revolving around ministry, could signal a remarkable shift in the discussion of the Ecclesiology study – but also of all other issues related to church unity.

#### **Faith and Order Plenary Commission (Kuala Lumpur, 2004)**

##### *The theme*

The theme of the Faith and Order Plenary meeting in Kuala Lumpur was shaped according to St Paul's Letter to the Romans 15:7: “Receive one another, therefore, just as Christ has received you, for the glory of God.” The theme was presented from the ecclesiological point of view by Rev. Prof. Dr Anne-Marie Reijnen. The apostle Paul invites Jews and Gentiles to follow Christ in building bridges between totally different cultures – hardly an easy gesture, rather, a very big effort. The polarity with which Paul wrestles, the reconciliation of different diets, is according to Dr Reijnen more divisive than other polarities emerging at that time; thus “the call extends to situations where the urge to separate at table is less founded.”<sup>32</sup> Through divine grace it was possible that Jews and Greeks ate together; women and men were one despite their biological differences; slaves and the rich were sisters and brothers in the Lord. “If, when and where these small revolutions occur, the focus is clearly eschatological. It is in order that a community may ultimately speak or sing ‘with one voice, to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 15:6).”<sup>33</sup>

As a liberal theologian Reijnen interprets the issue of

"Receiving One Another" in sociological terms, bringing into discussion the concepts of "believing" and "belonging". Based on the experience of churches in Western Europe, and particularly in Great Britain, Reijnen argues that today believing and belonging do not go together. Society has changed considerably from being homogenous in the Middle Ages; today many in the West "believe without belonging".<sup>34</sup> The tendency in the West is to participate in life, to be a member of a society without making a commitment to a particular party, society or group.<sup>35</sup> Reijnen poses the question: is this a result of the victory of the Christian principles of equality, leading to the withdrawal of Christianity from the public area and its retreat into the private sphere? It seems that "receiving one another", backed up fully by Western political systems and social "political correctness", has become the norm.

In any ecclesiological reflection it is difficult to avoid the issue of authority in the church. Confronting the authority of the bishop of Rome – understood as "one pastor (*primus inter pares*) as the personal guarantee of the Apostolic succession"<sup>36</sup> – Reijnen advocated the Reformed viewpoint of the shared responsibility of all believers. The difference in forms of leadership between the times of the Apostles and today should be acceptable within the "visible church". To demonstrate the weight laid upon the words of St Paul, "receive one another", and to show that this means far more than a simplistic modern transformation of the Christian principle of equality, Reijnen refers to the work by Robert W. Jenson:

The triune God is not a monad; he is the life of the Father and the Son in and by their Spirit. Thus he is in himself a *communio*, and so has room for others to share his life, if he so chooses. ... By God's free choice, he does in fact open the communion he is for created persons, for the church.<sup>37</sup>

Then, by modelling a theological discourse according to a proposition of the philosopher Jean-Marc Ferry about the four types of grammar, Reijnen suggests considering the "grammar of

validation". This is "one that creates room for critical reflection (on justice and the lack of it, on truth and untruth)", so that every action or thought is measured against the critical reflection over ideals, how things should be: "To become conscious of the grammar of validation is to sharpen our perception of different orders. ... we find more 'regulatory' than 'factual' affirmations in scriptures. They are witnesses to God's truth, and as such are in contradiction with the way things are in the world."<sup>38</sup> Taking truth and justice as the foundation for the authoritative approach to another person, another community or another church, Reijnen suggests practising a personal validation of the act of "receiving one another". While overcoming the postmodern uncertainty as to a permanent source of authority by referring to the Scriptures read and used "properly", Reijnen speaks from the Reformed tradition. By placing authority in the midst of personal and communal validations, she tries to harmonize the tradition of the Reformed church with the heritage of postmodern society. How helpful is this for Christians who are ecumenically engaged and thus challenged with the theme of "receiving one another"? Is it ecumenically justifiable to "believe without belonging"? Can common critical reflection replace the traditional criteria for belonging?

From the Brazilian context Dr Valburga Schmiedt-Streck spoke of the grammatical code of the Brazilian (or rather Latin American) peoples: "Here people speak from within God and not about God. They trust in God, because, as they perceive it, they experience God in their thinking about the hard reality of every day."<sup>39</sup> Latin American society nurtures *homo convivalis* rather than *homo faber*; for them relationships are determinant, knowledge goes through relationships and thus the local epistemology is open, an otherness "where the transcendent is not outside the community but is together with the community as they suffer and struggle for life."<sup>40</sup>

Thus the two contexts interpreted differently the theme of "Receiving One Another": the Western European context – not without a strong contribution from Reformed theology – suggested that civil society, which in its turn had been influenced by the

Christian principle of equality, provides a fresh source for continuous reception. The Latin American context, on the other hand, suggested that reception lies *within* the continuous relationships. In both cases societies are given a decisive role in the reception process; but differing emphases make these contextual interpretations distinctive and unique.

### *The evaluation of the study document*

Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima reviewed the ecclesiology draft presented to the Plenary Commission in 2004 within a wider framework of issues related to the ecclesiological "ethos" in the WCC, as well as in the broader ecumenical movement.<sup>41</sup> In the light of recent developments in the WCC, especially in view of the proposals in the Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, he noted that "the churches have to re-appropriate their tasks and goals towards the koinonia/communion within a eucharistic fellowship of the same body and blood of Christ, wherein at the same time they still remain divided."<sup>42</sup> The Special Commission Report, one of the latest ecumenical statements on ecclesiology, addresses the Orthodox Churches with an ambitious task of defining the questions: "Is there space for other churches in Orthodox ecclesiology?" and "How would this space and its limits be described?"<sup>43</sup> It is also difficult to overlook a certain regret expressed in the paper regarding the present situation in the ecumenical movement – because there are cases where unity in faith has collapsed; yet what is still in full strength is the *hope* for unity.

The Ecclesiology study, according to Metropolitan Gennadios, has the potential to play a major role in fulfilling the prayer of the Lord "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). While connecting the study with the upcoming WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre, ecclesiological themes for further examination were named by both study moderators, including the church local and universal, and one and diverse.<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that nearly two years after the Porto Alegre Assembly and after the publication of TNMC in its

present form, the Faith and Order Stranding Commission gave the mandate for further study on the "Limits of Diversity".<sup>45</sup>

Bishop John Hind pointed out in Kuala Lumpur that BEM was widely seen as implying a particular understanding of, or at least a particular way of thinking about, the Church. The task assigned to TNMC will be:

on the one hand [to] provide encouragement for those Christian communities who can do so to reconsider their relationship with other churches, and on the other also help highlight areas which are more difficult than we once thought. That was one of the lessons of BEM – namely, that a text may simultaneously facilitate moves towards unity and sharpen divisions.<sup>46</sup>

The reaction to the study document by Rev. Dr Peter Lodberg showed that a critical engagement with the text was urgent at all levels of church life. His concise reflection leads towards two major criticisms: first the difficulty of relating the present text to parish level (although the text itself is clear and very well written); and second the lack of issues reflecting the extreme ideological positions associated with Christianity, which Faith and Order must also address. "Does the worldwide Christian church agree with Christians in Palestine in rejecting the heretical teachings of Christian Zionism, teachings that facilitate and support extremist policies as they advance a form of racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Christ?"<sup>47</sup>

It is true that churches and Christians in the ecumenical movement must deal with such issues in a critical and constructive way; but Faith and Order has the authority to tackle such questions from the determinative perspective of their relevance to the *unity of the church*. The fact that the churches and the ecumenical movement have been vacillating in matters such as the above partly reflects their own failure to make a mark in the massively secularized societies in which we live today. Yes, the ecumenical movement



makes statements against war and terror, and exhorts the people of God towards peace and reconciliation – but this has little effect on today's political realities. Even so, the more Christians are engaged in critical reflection on such issues, the better. But, to use the language of the author – "Is it necessary to take a corporate stance in order to preserve the authenticity and credibility of the Christian community?" – is also a part of the necessity of the search for "visible unity" and will remain a continuing question until all may be one (cf. John 17:21).

## Conclusion

The papers in the present volume show different expectations among theologians concerning the convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ranging from high appreciation to a strong criticism of the BEM process and various actors involved in it. The challenge to the newly emerging *The Nature and Mission of the Church* process is to discern from the previous experience in order to know how to take the process forward constructively.

The final question to be answered is: will the reception of TNMC provide substantial insights into the ecclesiological convergence among the churches? Will the gaps in the convergence on baptism, eucharist and ministry be filled in? Can the process around the new convergence text assist the issue of Christians' "shared identity"? If the answer is "yes", then the text will be useful at various levels of church life and therefore received – also "from below" – thus giving considerable support to its reception at the level of the highest church authorities.

## NOTES

1. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2005.

2. The statements of the BEM document are "the fruit of a 50-year process of study stretching back to the first Faith and Order Conference at Lausanne in 1927. The material has been discussed and revised by the Faith and Order Commission at Accra (1974), Bangalore (1978) and Lima (1982). Between the Plenary Commission meetings, a steering group on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry has worked further on the drafting. ... "This work has not been achieved by the Faith and Order Commission alone. Baptism, eucharist and ministry have been investigated in many ecumenical dialogues. The two main types of interchurch conversations, the bilateral and multilateral, have proved to be complementary and mutually beneficial." *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, World Council of Churches, Geneva 1982, p. viii. The major decision for the BEM project was made in Aarhus in 1964. *The Ecumenical Review*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, vol. 54, no. 4, October 2002, p. 433. The most significant work of the Theological Commission in the area of ecumenical understanding of the nature of the Church was achieved between Lund (1952) and Montreal (1963) through the theological commission on "Christ and the Church" and published a year before the WCC Assembly in New Delhi: *One Lord, One Baptism: Report on The Divine Trinity and the Unity of the Church and on The Meaning of Baptism by the Theological Commission on Christ and the Church*, London, SCM/Press, 1960. Among the studies on general ecclesiological issues one should also mention the report on "The Redemptive Work of Christ and the Ministry of his Church", in *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order: Montreal 1963: the Report*, ed. by P.C. Rodger and L. Vischer, Faith and Order Paper No. 42, London, SCM/Press, 1964, pp. 61-69.
3. *The Ecumenical Review*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, vol. 54, no. 4, October 2002, p. 432.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 434.
5. The matter was made clear in Bristol in 1967. *Ibid.*, p. 436.
6. *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report, Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991*, ed. by Michael Kinnamon, Geneva, WCC Publications and Grand Rapids, W. B. Eerdmans, 1991, p. 173.
7. Lukas Vischer, "Is This Really 'the Unity We Seek'? Comments on the Statement on 'The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling', Adopted by the WCC Assembly in Canberra", in *The Ecumenical Review*, *op. cit.*, no. 4, 1992, p. 472.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 472.
9. *The Ecumenical Review*, *op. cit.*, vol. 54, no. 4, October 2002, p. 442.
10. *The Ecumenical Review*, *op. cit.*, vol. 54, no. 1, January-April 2002, p. 159.
11. Mary Tanner, "The Effect of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry on the Church

- of England", in *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, Bern, Stämpfli & Cie, July-September 2002, p.210.
12. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* 1982-1990, *Report on the Process and Responses*, Faith and Order Paper No. 149, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1990, p.6.
  13. *Ibid.*, p.30.
  14. The Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela (1993) with its theme, "Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness", became a turning point from BEM to a wider ecclesiological theme. *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the World Conference on Faith and Order*, ed. by Thomas Best and Günther Gassmann, Faith and Order Paper No. 166, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1994.
  15. *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 181, Geneva, WCC/Faith and Order, 1998.
  16. The Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC was formed as a parity committee of 30 Orthodox (both of the Eastern and Oriental churches) and 30 non-Orthodox members and worked on the issues reflected in its title. See the Report in *The Ecumenical Review*, *op. cit.*, vol. 55, no. 1, January 2003.
  17. The Apostolic Faith study produced *Confessing One Faith: Towards an Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as Expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (381), Faith and Order Paper No. 153, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1991.
  18. *Apostolicity and Unity: Essays on the Porvoo Common Statement*, ed. by Ola Tjørdhom, foreword by K.G. Hammar and David Hope, Geneva, WCC Publications and Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 2002, pp.147,153,173,240.
  19. It is encouraging for theologians involved in the ecumenical movement that the fruits of theological reflections carried out ecumenically display a resilience comparable to the traditional theologies: that is, they can come to an agreement with one voice, in spite of the many voices in the background.
  20. *The Nature and Mission of the Church* was sent out to the churches and sister organizations in January 2006, right before the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches.
  21. It is worth mentioning that representatives of the Pentecostals, Society of Friends and Salvation Army took part in the process at different levels.
  22. Alan D. Falconer, "The Church: God's Gift to the World – On The Nature and Purpose of the Church", in *International Review of Mission*, Geneva, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, vol. CX no. 359, October 2001, p.389.
  23. *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: Ecumenical Reflections on the Church*, ed. by

- Tamara Grdzelidze, Faith and Order Paper No. 197, Geneva, WCC Publications, p.87.
24. *Ibid.*, p.84.
  25. *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*, *op. cit.*, p.163.
  26. *Ibid.*, p.164.
  27. In some mysterious way, the consultation did not raise the issue of definition for Holiness. It could have been argued in separate groups but the discussion did not occur in spite of the presence of some theologians with a strong position in postmodern theology.
  28. *Ibid.*, p.91.
  29. *Ibid.*, p.247.
  30. *Ibid.*, p.250.
  31. *Ibid.*, p.253.
  32. *Faith and Order At the Crossroads: Kuala Lumpur 2004. The Plenary Commission Meeting*, ed. by Thomas F. Best, Faith and Order Paper No. 196, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2005, p.159-160.
  33. *Ibid.*, p.160.
  34. Reijnen bases her argument on the study of Grace Davie in *Identities religious en Europe*, ed. by Grace Davie and Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Paris, La Découverte, 1996, p.176.
  35. *Faith and Order At the Crossroads*, *op. cit.*, p.160.
  36. *Ibid.*, p.162.
  37. *Ibid.*, p.164.
  38. *Ibid.*, p.166.
  39. *Ibid.*, p.171.
  40. *Ibid.*, p.172.
  41. *Ibid.*, p.182.
  42. *Ibid.*, p.182.
  43. *The Ecumenical Review*, *op. cit.*, vol. 55, no. 1, January 2003, p.7.
  44. *Faith and Order At the Crossroads*, pp.182 and 175.
  45. See especially the material in the present study document *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, *op. cit.*, the "box" on pp.37-39. TNMC is composed of a major convergence text and a series of so-called "boxes", in which divisive or conflicting issues are juxtaposed.
  46. *Faith and Order At the Crossroads*, *op. cit.*, p.177.
  47. *Ibid.*, p.184.

## Contributors

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